NMP

COMICS FEATURE

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January No. 8

An Interview with CARY BATES Senior writer for SUPERMAN and the FLASH

●

The Fandom Zone

●

Beginning this issue: THE LOST COMICS COMPANIES

●

The Weed of Crime Bears...

MOON KNIGHT

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AN INTERVIEW WITH CARY BATES

The man behind the ***fastest man alive*** and the ***man of steel.*** pg. 24

THE LOST COMICS COMPANIES

The secrets of the little-known publishers, one by one. ***By Chuck Wooley.*** pg.67

THE WEED OF CRIME BEARS... MOON KNIGHT!

A look at fandom's new favorite Darknight Detective. ***By Kurt Busiek.*** pg.54

ANIMATED CHATTER

The cartoon scene. ***By Peter Sanderson and Claude Bamff.*** pg.18

END NOTES

Gerber's Stewart the Rat character emerges. Review ***by Peter Sanderson.*** pg.80

THE FANDOM ZONE

"It Was Comics Time!" How it happened. ***By Don and Maggie Thompson.*** pg.37

"Ride the Tiger." **Bob Jennings** reviews fanzines. pg.40

GUILTY FANTASIES

The spectre of violence in comics rears its crimsoned head– ***By Peter Gillis.*** pg.76

HEADLINES

pg. 9

MORNING NOTICES

Comments on past issues, and issues raised in past issues. pg. 6

OPENING NOTES

COMICS FEATURE'S role in the news-gathering game. pg. 4

THE SUPER-TEAM SPIRIT PART I–

The beginning of our ***"Super - Groups Through Time"*** series. ***By Murray Ward.*** pg.47

SUPERMAN'S OTHER LOVES

And why he's still single. Part II of "Superman's Women." ***By Margaret O'Connell.*** pg.58

WOMEN IN TERRY AND THE PIRATES PART III–

Part III: April Kane, Sanjak, and Raven Sherman. ***By Richard Howell.*** pg.71

Front Cover by Curt Swan and Bill Sienkiewicz
Back Cover by Bill Black. Colored by Richard Howell.

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OPENING NOTES

This is a very important issue of ***COMICS FEATURE***. Believe it or not, it marks the end of our first year of publication. It's been an exciting period of growth for us: we've expanded from our original size to our current 84 pages, our schedule has changed from bi-monthly to monthly, and our editorial staff has jumped from just two overworked editors to a staff of six (still overworked, alas). While we are overjoyed at all this growth, ***COMICS FEATURE*** plans to change even more in the coming months. We feel that we have a certain responsibility to our readers and comics fandom in general to change and to conform more closely with the interests of our readers, yet at the same time to expand and to illuminate areas of the comics medium of which most fans are only tangentially aware.

Take our news section, for example. There are now at least five regularly-published magazines and newspapers that cover the major comics companies. While we hope that **CF**'s approach to news reporting, with its emphasis on why something is happening rather than a mere recounting of what happened, is different enough from the other publications to justify our continued coverage of the happenings at Marvel and DC, we fell that many other newsworthy occurrences of interest to comics fans are generally overlooked by the fan press. New fan-generated projects, breakthroughs in animation, developments in comics strips, these topics are too often pushed aside in favor of minute reports about who will draw next month's ***SPIDER-MAN***. **CF** will be devoting more time and space to covering the ***under***-reported developments. In the coming months we plan to add regular news sections on animation, comic strips, and fan projects that will enable our readers to keep up with what's happening outside of the two major companies.

In addition to the expansion of our news section, **CF** will also be devoting more space to keeping fans aware of the functions and services that would be of interest to them. The ***"Fandom Zone"*** will soon run listings of exhibitions and museum shows that comics fans would love to see, were they only aware of their existence. Research classifieds requests for information needed for various indexing or research projects will become a regular feature of our ***"Fandom Almanac."*** These and other listings will help keep you posted on what there is to see and do in comics fandom.

Also of interest to ***COMICS FEATURE*** readers is the fact that the second NMP magazine is being released this month: ***LOC*** (Letter of Comment). ***LOC*** is designed to aid fans' communication, the primary aim of fandom, and to do it in an entertaining and informative way. ***LOC #1*** features articles by respected fan journalists like Don and Maggie Thompson, James Van Hise, Peter Sanderson, Kurt Busiek, Carol Strickland, Gene Phillips, etc. In ***LOC***, each picks the topic which he feels needs discussing, and explores it to its limit: Murray Ward pinpoints contradictions in Wonder Woman's origin and reaches a startling conclusion; Carol Kalish studies the reasons that comics generally do not appeal to women; Richard Howell discusses the development of the current comics narrative style of "overwriting"; Sanderson on the new X-men; Busiek on the new Teen Titans; Strickland on shoddy treatment of Ms. Marvel, and so on.

But the most exciting thing about ***LOC*** is that it's designed so that in coming issues at least half of its substance will be ***your*** responses, ***your*** opinions, and ***your*** viewpoints. That's right, ***LOC*** is to be a letter-forum publication, featuring thought-provoking articles ***and*** the thoughts they provoke. Get ***LOC***. Get ***involved.***

COMICS FEATURE will always be changing. It will always be searching for new ways to keep you informed about all the myriad aspects of the comics medium. Whether it be the start of a new series of the history of comics or the introduction of our yearly "Year In Review" overview of the industry, ***COMICS FEATURE*** will always be the first to try and fulfill the needs of its readers.

To that end, we would like to take this opportunity to ask our readers who know of any little-publicized comics-related projects to find out about them and let us know. Also, our readers are encouraged to submit suggestions for subjects which they would like to see covered, that they would enjoy seeing articles about. Remember, if ***COMICS FEATURE*** is serving comics fandom, it means we need to hear from ***you***. ●

-THE EDITORS

Many thanks to our friends at the Museum of Cartoon Art (Comly Ave., Port Chester NY, 10573) for getting us a Superman cover drawing when everyone else failed, and all seemed lost. B&W copies of this beautiful effort by Curt Swan can be obtained by sending $1.00 to the Museum itself. Thanks agains, guys!

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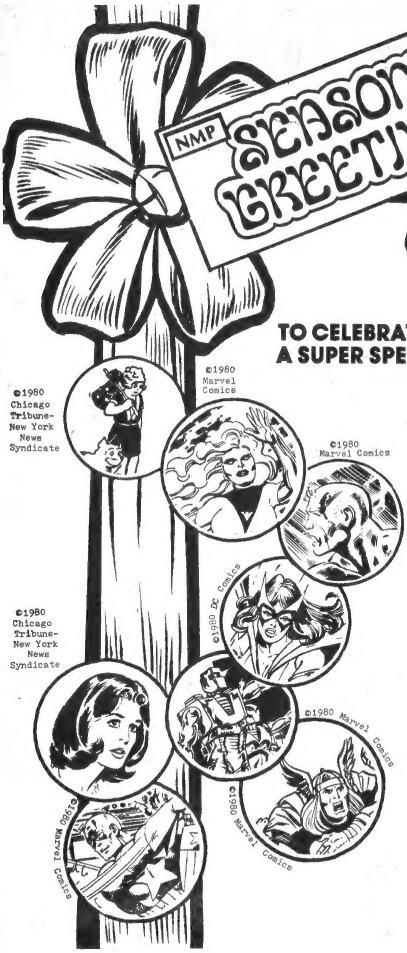

COMICS FEATURE

TO CELEBRATE OUR FIRST ANNIVERSARY, A SUPER SPECIAL RETROSPECTIVE ISSUE!!

1980's BEEN A GOOD YEAR for ***COMICS FEATURE!*** Our fresh, positive attitude has been a ***hit*** with ***comics fandom*** and ***professionals*** alike. We're the ***smash hit*** of the ***year!!***

AND WE'RE CELEBRATING!!

Our first, trend-setting ***YEAR IN REVIEW*** section is a ***FREE BONUS*** in ***COMICS FEATURE #9!!*** It includes an ***overview*** of the major news events in comics for 1980. ***Also*** included are nearly ***twenty*** comprehensive reviews of ***1980's significant comics series (including the MINI-SERIES, DAREDEVIL, THOR, the NEW X-MEN, ADVENTURE, THE FLASH,*** and ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS!!)*** by comicdom's ***top*** columnists (including ***Peter Sanderson, Margaret O'Connell, Kurt Busiek, Greg Potter, Carol Kalish,*** and ***Richard Howell!!***)

NOT TO MENTION. . .

An interview with ***LEONARD STARR,*** the artist/writer of ***the*** great American human-interest comic strip ***MARY PERKINS ON STAGE*** and artist/writer of the phenomenally successful revival of ***Little Orphan ANNIE!!***

Plus our ***USUAL GREAT FEATURES: THE FANDOM ZONE*** (now featuring a column by Don & Maggie Thompson), ***THE LOST COMICS COMPANIES*** by Chuck Wooley, and our continuing ***PROFILES OF THE SUPER-GROUPS*** series by Murray Ward!!

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MORNING NOTICES

SEND YOUR **FEATURE** COMMENTS TO:
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CAT YRONWODE
Willow Springs,
Mo.

Hello Folks,

I greatly enjoyed your article on the "Women in **TERRY & THE PIRATES**," Richard. Your analysis of Burma was quite astute. Only one thing bothered me—she doesn't refer to herself "in the second person" but in the THIRD person. (2nd person would be "you are," 3rd is "Burma is"). A trivial point—but this 3rd person monologuing is the ***bane*** of Caniff's characterization: the Dragon Lady does it, Copper Calhoon does it, Summer Canyon does it—***ad nauseum***! Relatively few of Caniff's ***men*** do it. Care to draw any conclusions from this? But back to Burma—the only illo you might have added to the very good selection you chose was that beautiful scene where Terry watches Burma dance, tries to dance with her and steps on her toes. That is one of the most sensitive and tender treatments of a young boy/man's passion I have ever read or seen.

The series of articles which centered on sex and "relationships" in comics (inclusing the review of ***DETECTIVES INC.***, the obit on Tex Avery and the two pieces on superhero love, death, "sleaze" and marriage) all segued together well: it is so ***good*** to see someone taking a positive attitude toward the emotional problems which have seemingly beset comics as a form of literature (due to the fact that both the creators and fans suffer from these same problems?) I will NEVER forget the issue of ***DETECTIVE*** in which Francine Langstrom turns into She-Bat and flies off, leaving her 3-month-old baby in the care of her husband. What does he do? Why, he changes into Man-Bat and flies off after her to battle some super-foe, leaving the baby alone in an open apartment in New York! They may be ***killed*** by the villain: ***who's minding the baby?*** But with the authors of comics so emotionally immature, so...so ***crippled***—can one realistically expect them to attempt stories about married parents as heroic figures? Not likely. the case is of course worse when the protagonists are ***female***. If marriage and parenthood spell the end of heroic adventure, then women (whose role is, ***of course***, to become married mothers) can only remain heroic if they are celibate or worse (a la Red Sonja)—elsewise they'll (gulp) have babies and stop being anything but moms. How many heroic ***mothers*** do you know of in comics or pulp fiction? Normandie Drake is too wimpy, although she does have her finer moments on occasion. Sue Storm Richards is a cryboby. Spitfire "lost her powers" (natch!) around the time she had her kid. That leaves Silk Satin—not only an adventuress by choice, but one who takes her daughter Hildie, ***with*** her on cases. Oh yes, and Summer Canyon. If there are others, I would ***love*** to hear about them! (Francine Langstrom, mentioned above, has given up heroics because she's convinced it would render her incapable of being a mother.) Now, as a mother, I'll agree that it's hard to be heroic (or even creative) until your child is weaned and maybe in school. So that leaves us with a bunch of women in their late 20s whose kids are semi-independent and who are just ***waiting*** to star in a good comic! Who'll write it? Come on, you potential Simon and Kirby teams—it's a vast untapped genre—let's see some action!

On an entirely different note, I find your use of exclamation marks after the headline of each news item to be a little...campy. It looked particularly innappropriate with the notice of Whitney Ellsworth's death. ***WHITNEY ELLSWORTH DIES!*** has all the emotional sensitivity of ***"U.S. BOMBS TOKYO!"*** or ***"SPIDERMAN MENACES!"*** I realize he died unexpectedly, but an exclamation point?

Finally, to append yet another comment about the death of the hero/heroine's lover—Murray R. Ward should have added Bob Powell's 1940-1944 feature ***"MR. MYSTIC"*** to the list—and it definitely pre-dates ***OHMSS***. Mystic (a direct forerunner of Ditko's Dr. Strange) had ***several*** ladies die on him—a Chinese girl (I've forgotten her name...no, it comes back to me—Sanshi[?]) and his long time "fiance" (lover) Elena who, bizarrely ***jilts*** him to dance with The Shadow Man of Death(!) while her best friend, Penny, tries to stop her...the thing is, all of Mister Mystic's lovers (I left out the other one who died in the Arctic...and Doctor Flarcia...) were in reality (according to those who knew him) ***Bob Powell's*** lovers—and each time he'd form a new "relationship," he'd kill off the old character who had arisen from the previous one! The death of Elena was particularly brutal and deleterious to the plot structure as they had been through ***plenty*** together and Mystic just calmly let her dance with Death, kno wing the consequences—worse yet, as she looked into Death's eyes and died, the "camera" cut back to Mystic and Penny standing ***together*** in the shadows. Next week, Penny was his girlfriend, and she became his "fiance" before the month was out.

Yours for realism(?) in fiction,
Cat Yronwode

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Dear Cat;

You are absolutely right about Burma's references to herself being in the third person. Who says editors have to be able to count, right? Seriously, though, that error should have been caught, and we thank you for correcting it. As for the second person references being the bane of characterization...well, they might be overused, but they do serve a legitimate dramatic function. They let the reader know just who the characters are. Admittedly, there are other ways to do so, but Caniff seems to have opted for the character talking to him/herself method increasingly frequently as the years go by. They appear to be some approximation of dramatic, monologue technique, reinforcing the "stagey" quality of most of Caniff's character interplay.

The "Marriage For Super-Heroes" series raised a lot of interest from our readers, and for those readers we recommend picking up a

copy of LOC#2 (due in February), in which Margaret O'Connell rebuts the "Sleaze and the Married Super-Hero" essay. (And is that S&K reference a directive aimed at CF's editors, whom you have already labelled "the Simon and Kirby of their generation"?)

JAY ZILBER
New York, NY.

R 'n' C:

I'm sure you're more aware than anyone what flaws and problems were encountered in your first issue, **#6**...but just in case nobody ever told you, each screen of your color separation has to be set at a slightly dirrerent angle, in order to avoid dot-overprinting and the mottling effect you saw. And, your red screen appears to be only about a 20-line screen, hence the "measles" effects. Even the blue screen is still too coarse, at 35-lines or so. ***Never*** use anything less than 65 lines per inch, preferably 85 lines; or even finer if your printer can handle it. And geez—look out for loose scraps of material that you don't want printed, such as the bottom of the Beast's pants-leg and his right wrist.

Let me break my negative comments with a positive one here: the material in ***CF #6*** was generally strong, perhaps even the strongest of all six issues to date (with the possible exception of **#4**, the ony one which I have so far not received). And I like some of the concepts behind the new designs and layouts that you're starting to play with. My prime complaint with Dean's books was that his layouts, though adequate for the amount of time he was given to throw an issue together, were really rather sterile and unimaginative. You've got some nice ideas, and if you can work out the bugs, ***CF*** can become the most attractive publication in its genre.

But...oh, those bugs. Is there any ***reason*** for all those heavy, haphazardly-thrown-in block borderlines throughtout the news section? Sure, they separate one item from another, but they also totally disrupt the flow of things, and turn each section into an independent segment rather than part of an ongoing whole. And where the heavy border was effective and proper for the "mourning box" around the Whitney Ellsworth notice, the effectiveness was lost when that heavy border appeared elsewhere on the same page and on every other page in the news section.

I hope you'll reconsider that choice of typeface. Maybe you intended the choice of a bold, condensed type to an aesthetic match for your heavy borders...but I feel like I'm being shouted at. Please—some quiet subtlety would be much more effective. Don't force the content to battle the form for the reader's attention. Content and form should work together, not compete.

Some of the technical paste-up and design errors I can chalk up to lack of time to finish the issue properly—and what was due to lack of experience will, I'm sure, correct itself as you put a couple more issues under your belts. I must say, however, that I was mildly embarassed by the number of ***proofreading*** errors that got past you, expecially in my own column, which trumpets about how fanzine publishers must have certain basic proofreading skills. I'll share a small part of the blame for having sent my column in so late—but I think this problem underscores what is perhaps the greatest difficulty that ***CF*** must overcome: its schedule.

In fact, whatever flaws Dean's issues may have suffered from, I would attribute 90 percent of them to this rigorous monthly schedule which was imposed on ***Feature*** much too early in the game, before any sort of inventory could be accumulated or lead time built up. Certainly, news and interviews should be current—and it was a pleasure to see Len Wein's interview appear so promptly, instead of being allowed to age like wine, as the ***JOURNAL*** often does with theirs. But everything else should be assembled much further ahead of schedule. The only reason I can see for having a monthly schedule now is because your publisher can make more money from twelve yearly issues than from 6 or 8. And the only way you're going to be able to justify that schedule with twelve ***good*** issues a year is by hiring enough staff to ***do*** the necessary clerical and proofreading work, so that you can get down to the business of editing a magazine you can be proud of.

Cheers,
Jay

Dear Jay;

The dot-screen problems were caused by our production manager's being trained in color separations without ever once having been told that there were *different kinds* of 20% zip-a-tone, and 50% zip-a-tone, etc. He assumed that 20% was 20%, even though they had some other funny markings on the sheets (which actually indicated the relative size of the dotted area to the clear area). So, measles were the result. Hopefully, you have noticed the difference in this issue's back cover. Several of the other things you found questionable about issue #6's appearance (borderline tape, mistakes on seps, proofreading, even the typeface) were exponents of the schedule which we inherited. Publishing a monthly magazine is not easy to begin with, and when one is hired sometime near the beginning of the third week of the next issue's production time, the next issue will either be rushed or skipped altogether. Let's not forget, too, that our publisher had already sold issue #6 to comic stores, and had sold advertising based on an already-specified release date. The choice resulted in an issue which we ourselves thought could have been much better, all things considered, but which was filled with strong material and was still worth what the reader was expected to pay for it. Our aim now is to produce issues that are worth considerably more than the reader is expected to pay for it, and we think we're making real progress toward that end. (Judging by the reaction to *FEATURE #7*, we're not alone in that, either)

We have also, since #6, gone about the process of hiring an assistant editor and a proofreader (Paul Dini and Bob Soren, respectively), and the results have already become apparent with the extra "polishing time" we editors now have. Again, with #6, it would have taken at least as long to locate and hire the right personnel to do those jobs as it would to do them ourselves. We realize #6 had problems, but things are improving. Thanks for your comments.

peter pan

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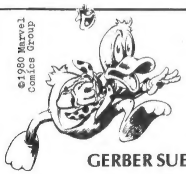


LAWSUITS FILED

GERBER SUES MARVEL, FLEISHER SUES ELLISON, COMICS JOURNAL

Steve Gerber has filed suit against the Marvel Comics Group in order to regain control and copyright over the Howard the Duck character. Long a fowl of contention between Gerber and Marvel, Howard has provided the impetus to the first major copyright challenge against a comics company since the ill-fated attempts of Siegel and Schuster to regain control of their creation, Superman.

STEVE GERBER

Although Gerber has been cautioned not to reveal the exact terms of his suit, he has stated that "the effect of the suit will be very positive for both the companies and the people working for them in the long term." The current system under which the copyright ownership is held solely by the publishing company has been, according to Gerber, "squelching the creative forces in comics over the last 10-20 years." If he wins the creative control to the duck character, Gerber maintains that his victory would create a new balance between the creative people and the publishing company. This new division of power would result in "better stories" since the creative staff would no longer be reluctant to develop profitable concepts for fear of losing control to their publishers. Gerber believes that a court victory would "encourage the medium to grow in a way it hasn't done in 30-40 years."

Marvel's position has always been that Howard the Duck was created under conditions of "work-for-hire," and that Gerber knew that he was specifically creating concepts solely for the use and profit of Marvel Comics Group. Gerber, however, has always argued that since Howard emerged before Marvel instituted the policy of requiring signed work-for-hire contracts by its creative staff, the duck was not governed by the regulations controlling work-for-hire. Indeed, Gerber has argued that Howard is a unique, personally-controlled character illegally usurped by Marvel.

The implications of Gerber's suit are tremendous. Most of Marvel's most profitable characters, The Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, The Hulk, etc., were all created prior to the official institution of work-for-hire contracts. If Gerber succeeds in regaining control of the duck character, the creators of these profit-making characters would be encouraged to file suits on their own behalf. A series of successful copyright challenges would redefine the entire business footing of the comics industry, resulting in massive changes in mass-market comic book publishing.

In an un-related case, Michael Fleisher has filed a two-million dollar suit against defendants Gary G. Groth, Harlan Ellison, and Fantagraphics, the publisher of ***THE COMICS JOURNAL***. Fleisher is suing for damages in recompense for what he terms "damaging remarks" made by Groth and Ellison in an interview with Ellison published in the ***COMICS JOURNAL #53***. Fleisher specifically rebelled against a series of remarks that, he claims, implied he was crazy. Both Groth and Ellison have denied any intent to maliciously damage Fleisher's reputation.

ALL-STARS RETURN

Some of the plans for the Roy Thomas-scripted, Len Wein-edited ***ALL-STAR SQUADRON*** comic have been announced. Rich Buckler, a favorite collaborator of Roy's, has been assigned the art chores.

The strip will chronicle the adventures of a "core" of WWII super-heroes on Earth-2 in the 1940s, and the other heroes who join in their missions from time to time. According to Thomas, the line-up as of the first installment will be: Doctor Mid-Nite, Hawkman, the Atom, Liberty Belle, Robotman, Plasic Man, Johnny Quick, and the Shining Knight. Thomas hopes to vary the ***Squadron's*** membership considerably as the series progresses, much as did the original ***ALL-STAR COMICS*** in the 1940s.

"The series will begin ***within*** the continuity of the old "***Justice Society***" stories," insists Thomas. He explains that after ***ALL-STAR*** #11 (the first post-Pearl Harbor issue), all the members went off to join the military in their civilian identities, regardless of whether they might accomplish more good for the U.S. by remaining super-heroes. "I see the ***All-Star Squadron,***" says Thomas, "as being one of FDR's schemes for making maximum use of our resources."

In that the ***Squadron*** will probably fight their battles on the home front, the book will immediately differ from Thomas' previous ***INVADERS*** series. "I want to stress," says Thomas, "that this is more a period piece than a war comic."

Various continuity-based questions have arisen about the use of some Quality Publications heroes in the primarily-DC ***Squadron***, which Thomas softpedals. "I don't want the series to get bogged down explaining which 'Earth' all these heroes came from. As far as I'm concerned, it's like the early days of Marvel, where you had several super-heroes in the same area, but they rarely met. I'm assuming that the Quality Plastic Man could have existed on the same Earth as the DC heroes, but they'd never before had any occasion to band together—now they do. Especially if the ***Squadron*** is under the White House's authority—remember Plastic Man was always working with the FBI."

ALL-STAR SQUADRON will feature very few characters whose Earth-1 counterparts have their own comics or prominent series—no Superman, Batman, or Wonder Woman at least. While Thomas is concerned that this might "hurt the potential commerciality" of the book, he understands the merchandising reasons which impelled the decision. To compensate, Thomas plans to play with the existing line-up to make it more commercially viable on its own. "Liberty Belle, for instance," explains Thomas, "had no real powers. I'm going to see if I can't do something about that." Thomas also plans to create new characters, including some new women characters (there were few during that period) to take some of the burden off Liberty Belle and the Phantom Lady. "I'd like to achieve a more pleasing racial/sexual balance to the group," he explains, "but I'll lead into it gradually, so as not to make it appear too obvious."

Numerous nostalgic aspects will be present (for those old enough to wax nostalgic about the '40s ***ALL-STAR***) such as Dr. Fate's half-mask, the infrequent but significant appearances of the Spectre, the Sandman's yellow-and-purple Simon-and-Kirby costume, and villains like Degaton and Solomon Grundy. Younger readers need not fear, however, for Thomas asserts that the purpose of these vintage components is "not to tie up loose ends, but because they actually make good stories."

●Two new members have been elected (posthumously) to the Hall of Fame at the Museum of Cartoon Art in Port Chester, New York: Al Capp, creator of ***Li'l Abner***, and Chic Young, creator of ***Blondie.*** Previously elected members include Roy Crane (***Wash Tubbs, Buz Sawyer***), Billy DeBeck (***Barney Google***), Rudolph Dirks ***The Katzenjammer Kids***), Walt Disney, Bud Fisher (***Mutt 'n' Jeff***), Hal Foster (***Prince Valiant***), magazine illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, Rube Goldberg, George Herriman (***Krazy Kat***), Walt Kelly (***Pogo***), Winsor McCay (***Little Nemo, Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend***), George McManus (***Bringing Up Father***), editorial cartoonist Thomas Nast, Frederick Opper (***Happy Hooligan***), Richard Outcault (***The Yellow Kid, Buster Brown***), Alex Raymond (***Flash Gordon*** and others), E.C. Segar (***Popeye***), and James Swinnerton (***Little Jimmy***).

THOMAS TAKES ON THE LEGION

Roy Thomas has also taken over the writing chores on the fan-favorite ***LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES*** title. He has recently traded his ***BATMAN*** assignment for it with longtime associate Gerry Conway, who has been steering the Legion's adventures almost uninterruptedly since issue **#251**. Conway thus commends 2/3 of the "Batman books," already being the regular scripter for the caped crusader's feature in ***DETECTIVE COMICS***.

Thomas explains that he was somewhat uneasy about the ***BATMAN*** assignment from the beginning, due to his wish to not script the adventures of any character who supports several series, such as do Batman and Superman. Thomas reports that he and Conway had originally planned to exchange assignments between Thomas' ***BATMAN*** and Conway's ***WONDER WOMAN***, but the latter book's fast-rising sales caused them to rethink that move. Thomas reports his reasons for taking over the ***LEGION*** were a combination of the fact that the characters did not appear anywhere but in their own title, plus the added incentive that their title regularly featured full-length 25-page stories. "I'm trying to avoid having to write less than full-length stories," explains Thomas. "It's just as hard for me to plot an 8-page story as it is to plot a 25-page one, so where's the advantage in writing the shorter one? Not only do I feel constrained in the shorter length, but I lose money, page per page." Thomas feels quite happy with his new assignment, and is full of enthusiasm, but has few concrete plans for the series as yet. "For one thing," he mentions, "the book has just changed editors, from Jack Harris to Len Wein. For another, Gerry was pretty far ahead on the plotting of the series. My first two scripts will be over his last two plots, so I'll be moving into it gradually." For his general plans though, Thomas wants to develop some of the characters who have been unconsciously labelled "minor" ones, and wants to show the reader more of the future world in which the Legion lives. Thomas also mentions making the "Legion girls' costumes sexier."

Jimmy Janes will be retained as penciller, according to current plans. Thomas regards Janes as an artist of "great potential," and plans to "get him excited about the project, too," which Thomas feels will result in Janes' producing "excellent work... in the style of Buckler or Pollard." Thomas professes to be very pleased with the artists with whom he has been working so far at DC, including Buckler, Ross Andru, Garcia-Lopez, and Jim Starlin.

About the Legion's almost-militant fan following, Thomas states, "I don't plan to annoy them by making changes just for the sake of making changes or contradicting anything that's been definitely established. But if I do, I'll expect to hear about it. Len thinks it's a good idea for the writers to do their own letter pages whenever possible."

STRIP NEWS

John Romita has left the ***SPIDER-MAN*** comic strip. Larry Lieber, regular penciller of ***THE HULK*** strip, has been named as his replacement. According to Marvel's Sol Brodsky, Romita enjoyed doing the strip but found that the pressures of working on a syndicated strip increasingly more difficult to bear. Romita had been the strip's credited penciller since its inception three years ago.

APOLOGIA:

In our interview with Tom DeFalco last issue, there was a quote from Mr. DeFalco on page 15 which read: "Jim was editor-in-chief so it was accepted by Marvel." That should have read: "Jim was editor-in-chief so he knew what the comic should have to be complete, to sell, to be a good successful comic book." In the actual transcript, the implication was that since Jim Shooter writes exemplary comic books and understands the form, he is editor-in-chief. Since he was co-plotting the ***"Dazzler"*** story with Mr. DeFalco, it benefitted from editorial input even as it was being composed, and was therefore acceptable upon submission. ***COMICS FEATURE*** had received a request to clarify this point, but failed to do so before the actual galleys went to print. Our apologies to Tom DeFalco and Jim Shooter for any potential misunderstandings.

Also, Bob McLeod has informed us that he did some inking on the ***"Dazzler"*** drawings printed in issue **#7** (pgs. 17-19). He also inked our last issue's cover, which was colored by Peter Ledger. Overdue credit and apologies to them both.

NEW MEDIA SIGNS MOENCH, SIENKIEWICZ

Peter Gillis, director of NMP's new graphic magazine line, announced several of the contributors to the first issue of NMP's ***ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED*** at the Thanksgiving ***CREATION CON***. Doug Moench, Paul Gulacy, Bill Sienkiewicz, Alan Weiss, and Gillis himself will all be doing work for the nascent publication.

Gillis described the collaborative effort by Doug Moench and Bill Sienkiewicz as a futuristic SF strip chronicling the conflict between Earth and its many colonies in space. The first installment of what will "probably be a long, involved story," is entitled ***"Magenta Core."*** The series as a whole has yet to be titled.

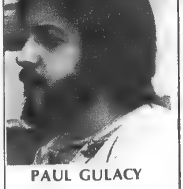
Gillis is very enthusiastic over what he has seen of the story. "It has everything—all the SF elements one could want and more! It's got androids and cyborgs, and recombinant DNA, the whole gamut." But Gillis is quick to offer reassurance that the story is not just a retelling of the typical "Space War" story: "There are more twists in the first installment than one would ever expect. It is ***not*** your typical space opera."

"Magenta Core" will probably be between 20 and 25 pages long. Moench has already completed the plot, and Sienkiewicz is even now doing the pencils. The story will be inked by Sienkiewicz and lettered by Debra Moench.

Gillis will be working with Weiss on a new western character, Hosea Ransom. Gillis described the character's first appearance as being a "classic western" story. However, considering Gillis later went on to say that key plot elements include gypsies, greek fire, and Franz Liszt, one gets the impression that it is a western totally unfamiliar to the likes of John Wayne.

The first story featuring Ransom will be around 10 to 12 pages. Weiss will be doing the pencils but will probably not be inking his own material. Both John Severin and Steve Leialoha have been suggested as possible inkers for the series.

Gillis also reports that Paul Gulacy has expressed an interest in pencilling and inking a short story for the first issue. The subject of this one-shot, story is being kept under wraps until the scripter/co-plotter has been chosen. Both Doug Moench and Don McGregor have expressed a willingness to work with Gulacy and Gillis is "almost positive that one of them will be writing the story with Paul." Regardless of whether or not Gulacy will be doing any interior work for the new maga-



PAUL GULACY

zine, he has definitely committed himself to providing the painting for the cover of the first issue.

ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED will be a 64 page magazine on "appreciably better stock than your typical comic book." 48 pages of the new magazine will be devoted to new graphic material, while the remaining editorial material will be texta rticles related to graphic material. "The first issue will have a piece on 'Forgotten Illustrators' like Albrecht Dore," explains Gillis. "There is a wealth of material to be covered that really hasn't been written about anywhere else."

The first issue of ***ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED*** is scheduled to be released late in March, 1981. It will retail for around $2.25.

Gillis also released information about some of the contents of ***FANTASY ILLUSTRATED***. ***ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED***'s sister title. "We're currently looking at submissions from Pat Boyette and Pat Broderick," declared Gillis. "We haven't signed anyone yet to do work specifically for that magazine, but we are developing a number of story lines that would be suitable. Craig Russell will almost definitely be doing the first cover. We don't know yet what the subject will be, but Craig will do a great job." Gillis hopes that the first issue of ***FANTASY ILLUSTRATED*** will be released within "Six weeks or so" after the first issue of ***ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED***.

● ***SECRET AGENT CORRIGAN—BOOK ONE*** is the title of Issue #2 of ***COMIC ART SHOWCASE***. It features 1967 sequence of that comic strip (by Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson) and will sell for $3.95.

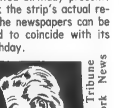
PLANS FOR TERRY'S RETURN

Rumors that the Chicago-Tribune-New York News syndicate plans to revive the ever-popular ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES*** comic strip have been recently confirmed. Last winter the syndicate, inspired by the success of the revived ***ANNIE*** and the upcoming ***TERRY*** movie, began to investigate possible means towards reviving the strip. One plan that was actually pursued consisted of the syndicate's contacting the strip's creator, Milton Caniff, to see if he would be interested in resuming the title that he abandoned in 1946. Although flattered, Caniff cited his heavy work load on ***STEVE CANYON*** and restrictions in his contract with Field syndicate as bars to his resumption of the series. Although he declined the offer, Caniff did provide the CT-NYN with advice about possible story development and treatment.

Although the syndicate was unable to secure Caniff for the strip, their current choice for the conveted position of artist/writer is equally respected. Joe Kubert is currently in the midst of negotiations with the syndicate and has already submitted a sample script plus accompanying artwork. Don Michel of the CT-NYN reports that they are "thrilled with the work." Unless the discussions break down, Kubert will probably be both writing and drawing ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES*** when it next reappears.

The actual starting date of the revival is uncertain until the creative staff is secured. However, if the negotiations with Kubert are successful and the Avco-Embassy ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES*** movie is released on time, the strip should appear by the fall of next year.

Since Oct. 22 marks the 46th anniversary of the strip, the news of its revival comes as a long awaited birthday present. With luck the strip's actual return to the newspapers can be scheduled to coincide with its 47th birthday.



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STERN AND BYRNE ON PETER PARKER

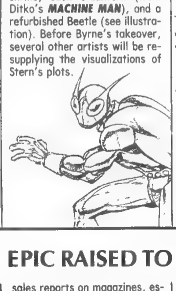
Roger Stern and John Byrne, the fan-favorite team so acclaimed for their recent collaborations on ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***, have agreed to team up again, this time as the regular staff on ***PETER PARKER THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN***. This will take effect, according to Stern, with "either ***#58*** or ***#59***. Probably ***#58***."

This new assignment is not much of one for Stern, who has been the regular writer on ***PETER PARKER*** for nearly a year (since ***#43***) as well as having been a collaborator (of sorts) with Byrne since their fan days. Stern expects that the addition of Byrne to the "extra Spider-Man" book can only increase its popularity. Byrne takes over the art chores from presently-regular ***PETER PARKER*** penciller Marie Severin.

"Marie is definitely ***not*** being 'bumped' off of the book," explains Stern. "She's one of my favorite pencillers and has been a joy to work with all along. The only trouble is that Marie is so valuable to all the special licensing projects Marvel gets, she keeps getting called away from her regular assignment. That's the primary reason for all the fill-ins lately, to try and give Marie the chance to get back on schedule. That's also the reason for the whole White Tiger back feature."

The last regular pencilling assignment held by Severin was the bi-monthly ***KULL*** series in the early 1970s. Recently she has inked and colored John Buscema's breakdowns on the ***SAINT FRANCIS*** comic.

Stern is uncertain about how the addition of Byrne's input will change the storyline projected for Peter Parker's upcoming adventures. Already set for future issues are confrontations between Spider-Man and: Nitro, Will O' the Wisp, Killer Shrike, Jack O'Lantern (from Ditko's ***MACHINE MAN***), and a refurbished Beetle (see illustration). Before Byrne's takeover, several other artists will be re-supplying the visualizations of Stern's plots.



A MOMENT'S PEACE
PLEASE, STEPHEN! IT'S SO BALMY AND BEAUTIFUL ... JOIN ME IN A MOONLIGHT SWIM!
NOT TONIGHT, MY DEAR. GO AHEAD ... ENJOY THE WATERS OF YOUR WISH. THERE IS MUCH I MUST REFLECT UPON.
©1980 Marvel Comics Group
ROGER STERN - MICHAEL GOLDEN - WRITER - PENCILS/INKS
BYRNE/RUSSELL - JOE ROSEN - ART STAFF
M. JO DUFFY - JIM SHOOTER - EDITOR
MAGGIE

To allow Frank Miller a chance to begin his tenure on ***DOCTOR STRANGE*** on schedule, a special fill-in issue will appear as ***#46***. It will feature an inventory story by Bill Kunkel (plot), David Michelinie (script), Kerry Gammill (pencils) and Al Milgrom (inks). In the back of the book there will be a special surprise for art lovers, as Michael Golden and Craig Russell team up for the first time in Roger Stern's ***"A Moment's Peace."***

EPIC RAISED TO BI-MONTHLY

EPIC ILLUSTRATED, Marvel's entry into the ***HEAVY METAL***-style adult illustrated fiction market, has graduated to bi-monthly publication status. The change will take effect with issue ***#5***, dated April but set for February release. Issue ***#6*** will follow two months later, in April, and succeeding issues will appear every two months thereafter.

Editor Archie Goodwin explains that the newsstand sales on the first four issues of ***EPIC*** have been "good enough" to validate this move. "It always takes awhile to get accurate sales reports on magazines, especially with a new undertaking like this," he further elucidates, "but the early reports have all been good. Marvel hasn't lost any money on ***EPIC.***"

Goodwin states that the exceptionally warm reception given to the ***EPIC*** material overseas has had a bearing on the decision to increase the frequency of publication. The European market demanded more material than a quarterly ***EPIC*** could give. "Also," states Goodwin, ***"EPIC*** is on a very different scale of advertising than are the other Marvel comics, and the type of advertisers ***EPIC*** attracts are more interested in a publication with a greater frequency."

To accomodate Goodwin's doubly-increased workload, Mary Jo Duffy has relinquished several of her color comic editorial assignments and joined him as ***EPIC's*** assistant editor.

EPIC #5 will feature: a cover by the Brothers Hildebrandt; the final installment of "Almuric," by Roy Thomas and Tim Conrad; "Flight Out," by Pepe Moreno; "Rising of the Moon," by Polly Low and Bill Mantlo; an interview with the Brothers Hildebrandt; Chapters eight and nine of "Metamorphosis Oddysey" by Jim Starlin; "Because It's There," by Ralph Macchio and Joe Jusko; "Jack Tales," by Charles Vess; and "Conquest of the Banana Planet," by Rick Veitch, among other features.

Upcoming projects for ***EPIC*** include: an adaptation of Larry Niven's "Wolf in the Time Machine"; another Moench/Gulacy collaboration; a war story by Harlan Ellison, "Life Hutch," illustrated by Ken Steacy; and a possible cover by Barry Windsor-Smith. The cover of ***EPIC #6*** is by Neal Adams.

FOUR MINI-SERIES

DC plans to bring out several more mini-series during the coming year. In addition to the ***MADAME XANADU*** series which is still in the throes of creative re-organization, the company has plans to produce three more short-run titles.

Dick Giordano, having recently returned to the ranks of DC editors, has been assigned a series that is tentatively entitled ***THE PHANTOM ZONE***, Giordano will edit but no other assignments have been made.

Current plans for the book are that it will reveal all the murky secrets involving the limbo-like Kryptonian Prison. In addition to finally cataloguing all the criminals who have been prisoners (no mean feat considering that a new Phantom Zone occupant seems to appear each year), the various histories of their crimes will also be laid bare. ***THE PHANTOM ZONE*** will be on sale in the late fall of 1981 to coincide with the release of ***SUPERMAN II***.

The second new mini-series, ***HEROES OF KRYPTON***, will be edited by Julie Schwartz. E. Nelson Bridewell, the consultant for the first mini-series, ***WORLD OF KRYPTON***, has been handed the writing assignment. No artist has been chosen yet for the project.

The three-part series will explore Kal-el's (Superman's) family history as it recounts the accomplishments of the many famous members of the "EL" family. The title is currently scheduled for release next Summer, again to take advantage of the release of ***SUPERMAN II***.

The third new mini-series, ***TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS***, will be edited by concept creator, Jack C. Harris. Harris had been awed by the sales success of several ***GREEN LANTERN*** issues that had prominently featured the Green Lantern Corps on their covers. He believes that a number of readers are attracted by the SF aspects of the group and is confident that the series will appeal both to long time ***GREEN LANTERN*** readers and to the casual buyer.

The series will reveal new information about the corps founders, The Guardians, and about the organization of the group. It will also recap all the disassembled information concerning the corps in a new three-part adventure that involves all the 3,600 Green Lanterns.

Marv Wolfman will plot the series. Len Wein will script it. Brian Bolland, DC's recent British discovery, will do the covers. No interior artist has yet been selected.

If all goes as planned, the series should appear starting in February, 1981.

MARVEL

● The long-delayed Marvel Summer Olympics book will finally be released in December, probably as ***MARVEL SUPER-HEROES SPECTACULAR***, with all references to the Olympics removed. The book boasts cameo appearances by virtually every Marvel super-hero, and introduces a number of new heroes from other countries. These include ***The Arabian Knight*** and Israel's ***Sabra*** (who were created for this book but, due to the delay, will first appear in ***INCREDIBLE HULK***), China's ***Collective Man***, France's ***Le Peregrine***, Germany's ***Blitz***, Australia's ***Talisman***, and South America's ***Defensor***. Other characters playing major roles include the Thing, Daredevil, Iron Fist, the Black Panther, Wolverine, Storm, the Angel, Captain Britain, Sasquatch, Darkstar and the She-Hulk. The plot involves the kidnapping of all of Earth's superheroes by The Grandmaster. He and a mysterious opponent then pit various heroes against each other in battle to determine the outcome of their "game." The prize is the life of The Grandmaster's brother, The Collector. Bill Mantlo and Mark Gruenwald co-plotted the story, which was scripted by Mantlo and pencilled by John Romita, Jr.

● There are new developments in Marvel's proposed fan market books. A new magazine, entitled ***MARVEL SHOWCASE***, has been proposed that will replace the previously announced ***MARVEL FANFARE***. The book will be 32 pages long and will retail for around $1. It will ***not*** be subject to the Comics Code Authority. ***SHOWCASE*** will be printed on 50 lb. coated stock and have 70 lb. coated stock covers. The result, Shooter states, will be like having a comic "Made entirely of regular comic covers," with their bright colors, and with an outside cover like the ones for ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED***. For the most part coloring will be done by hand separations. Shooter says that Marvel will "try to do experiments" with the material for the book.

● Despite the fact that all three Marvel projects bill themselves as featuring work by the finest comics writers and artists available, Shooter believes that there are enough creators of sufficient caliber to do work for all of the books. He wants to provide an opportunity for quality writers and artists to both use Marvel characters in unusual ways or to develop new concepts. Shooter wants to "bring in great people who don't do regular comics" to do work for these projects, and names Russ Heath and Al Williamson as examples of the kind of creators he means.

MARVEL

● As of **#258 CAPTAIN AMERICA** has a new regular pencil artist, Gene Colan. The position of regular writer is still vacant.

● The long-bruited **X-MEN ALBUM**, featuring the current version of Marvel's team of misfit mutants, will be drawn by Neal Adams. Longtime readers will remember that Adams drew nine issues of the original series back in the late 1960s-early 1970s. It will be scripted by Chris Claremont and indications are that Kitty "Sprite" Pryde, the group's newest member, will play a major role. Release is projected to be sometime in 1982.

● Marvel has announced that it's subscription enrollment and the rate of growth of that enrollment have both reached record highs. There are now, for example, over 40,000 subscriptions to **THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN.** Marvel has been in the throes of a major subscription drive for a little over a year. In addition to promoting subscriptions through house ads in their various titles and in their experimental newspaper inserts, several subscription agencies have been used to sell thousands of subscriptions through school fund-raising programs.

● The working title of Jim Starlin's **METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY** sequel changed to **DREADSTAR**. It was discovered that Mike Grell had already laid legal claim to the former working title, **STAR RAZER**.

● There will be a crossover in concurrent issues of **ROM** and **POWER MAN AND IRON FIST**, each appearing in the other's books the same month. The stories, however, will be separate but related ones.

● Upcoming in the still-planned **MARVEL UNIVERSE** title are: a two-part adaptation of Kipling's **JUNGLE BOOK** stories under the working title **"Mowgli the Jungle Boy,"** with art by Gil Kane; a Spider-Man/Scarlet Witch team-up by Mike W. Barr and Sandy Plunkett; and a recently-uncovered Iceman solo story written and drawn in the early 1970s by Len Wein (plot) and Ross Andru (pencil art). This story is the first of a proposed multi-part series and was intended to comprise one-half of a companion magazine to the late **ASTONISHING TALES** and **AMAZING ADVENTURES** split-feature comics.

● **MOON KNIGHT #6** will feature a painted cover by Earl Norem.

● Marvel has finally appointed a new creative staff for **THE AVENGERS**. Bill Mantlo will plot and script the book, Gene Colan will pencil, and Dan Green will ink. The first example of the new team's work will be –206, which guest stars the Human Torch. #207-210 will be a series of fill-ins which has been already assigned before the new team was assembled. Mantlo and Colan will return with #211.

Colan, long associated with Marvel's moodier titles such as **TOMB OF DRACULA** and **DOCTOR STRANGE**, asked to be assigned to one of Marvel's mainstream super-heroe titles. He is no stranger to the **AVENGERS**, having pencilled issues #63-65.

● **STAR WARS #50**, by Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson, will feature a "two-layered story," according to Goodwin, in which "just about every character from the movie series" appears. There will be a framing story (which will take place after **THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK**) surrounding a flashback tale of Han Solo and Chewabacca the Wookiee. Current plans call for the issue to be a double-sized, 75 cent comic.

● Marvel is planning on releasing four British Annual-style comics in the U.S. through the specialty shops. They include an **X-MEN** volume reprinting the second story of the Sentinels (by Roy Thomas, Neal Adams, and Tom Palmer), a **CAPTAIN AMERICA** volume (reprinting Jim Steranko's tenure on the feature), several **HULK** adventures (from the early issues of his own short-lived magazine), and a **SPIDER-MAN** collection reprinting late Ditko and early Romita stories, all scripted by Stan Lee). They will each be 64 pages long, hardbound, and cost $3.95. The first should appear in June of 1981 and the others in the three subsequent months.

● With issue **#26, MARVEL PREVIEW** changes its name to **BIZARRE ADVENTURES**.

● Joe Rubenstein will be the new regular inker on **THE X-MEN**, beginning with **#144**, the Brent Anderson-pencilled issue.

● The **MARVEL-DC** joint projects slowly move forward. Jim Shooter announced that the Marvel produced project, the **SUPERMAN-SPIDER-MAN** team-up, has met with still more delays. Due to Shooter's difficulties in finishing the script the project has been postponed until spring of next year.

Due to the delays involved in the production of the Marvel-DC books, the price has been increased to $2.50.

YOU'RE FINISHED, DOOM.
ON THE CONTRARY! I'M EXACTLY WHERE I WANTED TO BE, LUTHOR!
WOW!
GREAT SHOT! KRYPTONITE!
PRECISELY! KRYPTONITE THAT YOU CANNOT HURL AWAY! KRYPTONITE YOU CANNOT FLEE!
...OR DUPLICATE YOURSELF FROM! FOR IT IS SO FUSED INTO THE FABRIC OF YOUR COSTUME!
...IMPREGNATED INTO THE VERY CORE OF YOUR SKIN!
OHHH!
THERE IS NO ESCAPE!
©1980 Marvel Comics Group, DC Comics

Various possible projects are now being discussed at Marvel in connection with the celebration of next year's twentieth anniversary of the publication of ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** #1, and hence of the start of the present-day Marvel line of comics. Among these is a special twentieth anniversary of ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** itself (#236, cover date November, 1981), which may have as many as sixty pages of story. John Byrne will both write and pencil the issue.

Probably in September of 1981 each Marvel comic will have a story that editor-in-chief Jim Shooter says will "harken back to the origin" of its characters in some way. It will not, he asserts, be "a simple retelling" of their origins.

There may even be a special book that will serve as ***"The Fantastic Four Roast,"*** patterned after the Friars' Club celebrations honoring performers through speeches filled with joking insults.

Mary Jo Duffy has passed her editorial duties on ***ROM, DOCTOR STRANGE,*** and ***THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK*** over to Allen Milgrom's editorial offices. Longtime Marvel inker Jack Abel joins Milgrom as his new assistant editor.

Marvel is still tentatively considering bringing out a comic book adaptation of Lucasfilms's next project, ***RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***. If the project goes foward, the writing assignment would go either to Archie Goodwin or Denny O'Neil. No artist has been mentioned.

Morgan LeFay will return to plague ***SPIDER-WOMAN*** in the latter's magazine, issue ***#39***. Current reports indicate that the story in which Spide-Woman investigates the strange disappearance of Ms. Marvel will not appear.

GENERAL

Upcoming in Leonard Starr's revival of ***ANNIE*** is a story involving Medicaid swindles. Daddy Warbucks will reappear soon, as will the Asp. Starr plans to use the "mystical strain" in ***ANNIE*** sparingly, to preserve the realistic modern elements of the strip which give credence to its more topical episodes. Nevertheless, Punjab and the Asp are too popular to exclude, and too integral to the strip as Warbuck's powerful servants. Starr is also considering reintroducing another Harold Gray character, Mr. Am, the "immortal man." Although Starr has reservations about using such a fantasy type in the updated settings of the new ***ANNIE***, he also believes that "the character might be irresistable."

A forty-four page series called ***"Freak Show"*** written by Bruce Jones with art by Berni Wrightson is now in preparation for serialization both in ***HEAVY METAL*** and France's ***PILOTE***. ***HEAVY METAL*** will begin serializing a new forty-four page ***"Cody Starbuck"*** adventure by Howard Chaykin in the May issue. Chaykin and Len Wein will collaborate on a new ***"Gideon Faust"*** tale for ***HEAVY METAL***, and the magazine may be running a strip by Neal Adams.

ELFQUEST #8 has been released by WaRP Graphics. The issue continues to chronicle the adventures of Richard and Wendy Pini's cast of elves, trolls, wolves, and humans. This issue marks the exact midpoint of the 15-issue storyline.

Other news from WaRP is that the first ***ELFQUEST PORTFOLIO*** sold out within three weeks of publication. The Pinis will also be preparing an ***ELFQUEST*** novel (prose, but with illustrations) for Playboy Press.

PARAGON EXPANDS

Bill Black has announced that Paragon Publications will soon commence publication of a new series entitled ***FUN COMICS***. Black describes the comic as being "inspired by the great Golden Age work of Simon & Kirby." The first several issues will feature new comic strips molded in the old Simon & Kirby fashion.

Issue #1 of ***FUN COMICS*** stars ***"Commando D"*** (based on the Simon & Kirby character, Captain 3-D) by Bill Black. Back-up stories include a 7-page ***"Phantom Lady"*** story and an eight-page ***"Haunted Horseman"*** reprint from the '50s by Dick Ayers. The rest of the issue will be comprised of text features on various aspects of the Simon & Kirby years. In all there will be 30 pages of graphics in a 36-page book. There will be no color in the first issue.

Issue #2 will include another ***"Commando D"*** story and a new ***"Stuntman"*** strip pencilled by Dan Read and inked by Bill Black. Current plans are to upgrade the packaging to include color covers.

Black also described some of the upcoming features in ***STAR FEMS*** #2. Paul Gulacy will be doing the covers as well as pencilling a Bill Black story concerning ***"Serena,"*** a female undercover agent in the future. Mike Zeck will pencil ***"Janet I-57."*** John Beatty will ink ***"Janet I-57"*** recounts the struggles of a young woman who attempts to overthrow the android government which rules the not-too-distant future. Finally Pat Broderick will pencil ***"Black Blaze"*** a futuristic "cowgirls in space" SF adventure.

In addition to ***STAR FEMS***, Black is working with Gil Kane on a number of projects. Currently planned is a 25-page (or more) story written by Black and pencilled by Kane. The story would be packaged similarly to the Eclipse's ***SABRE***. In addition to the Kane pencil job, a portfolio of Kane's artwork (much of it unpublished) is being organized.

DC

● Issue **#271** of ***WORLD'S FINEST COMICS*** will feature a special retelling of the first team-up of Superman and Batman, as that classic story will then be exactly two hundred **WF**-issues old. Roy Thomas will script it, and Rich Buckler will probably be drawing it. This anniversary retelling will attempt to reconcile the numerous and myriad "first meetings" of the two heroes that have appeared. Aided by ace DC researcher E. Nelson Bridewell, Thomas is also attempting to include (and reconcile) the first meeting of the two characters from the 1940s radio show. This will doubtless prove no easy feat, as a teenage Bruce Wayne appeared there with his parents(1)

Thomas will continue his string of "first meeting" stories in ***ALL—STAR SQUADRON***, in which he will explain the circumstances of the initial encounter of the Golden Age of Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, and the Flash, and, in another episode, the meeting of the Golden Age Superman and Batman. Thomas will be "adapting" these untold tales from Golden Age covers of ***COMICS CAVALCADE*** (on which Wonder Woman wins a foot race with GL and the Flash) and ***WORLD'S FINEST*** (on which Superman and Batman meet at a USO show). These cover scenes are canonical, if non-continuous, evidence of such meetings, and are sure to institute a debate among Golden Age scholars and continuitists over the true place of symbolic covers. Thomas, unconcerned, refers to the process as "having fun with my Microfilm."

BUT BEFORE CONTINUING THE PURSUIT, A VITAL MATTER MUST BE SETTLED...
SUPERMAN, YOU CAN DEPEND ON ME TO KEEP SECRET YOUR IDENTITY AS CLARK KENT! AND ONLY YOU AND MY PAL ROBIN KNOW THAT I'M BRUCE WAYNE!
I'LL KEEP YOUR SECRET, TOO, BATMAN! BUT WHAT'LL WE DO ABOUT THAT BANDIT?
©1980 DC Comics

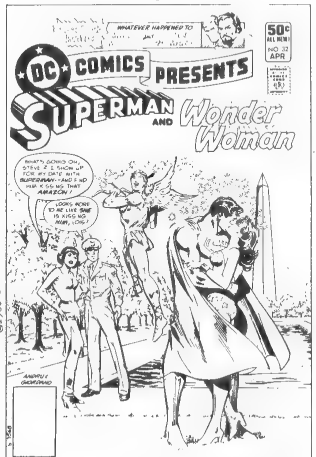
● In ***SUPERMAN FAMILY*** Supergirl will soon quit her job as guidance counselor at New Athens school and embark on yet another career, courtesy of scripter Jack C. Harris. The job? Our Kryptonian ingenue (in her civilian identity as Linda Danvers) will portray the villainess on a TV soap opera. "I got the idea from Chris (Superman) Reeve," explains Harris. "He told me that his soap opera character did the most horrible things, and whenever he'd go out, old ladies would scold him about his actions, beat him over the head with umbrellas, and like that." Doubtless many broken umbrellas will result from Linda's new job, which will begin in "either **#208** or **209**."

Harris further states that he went to the set of ***ALL MY CHILDREN*** to research props, techniques, and general work habits. The title of Harris' fictional soap opera is ***SECRET HEARTS***, which longtime DC readers will remember as the title of one of their late Romance comics.

● Effective January 1, 1981, Jack C. Harris will become the Assistant Foreign Sales Manager for DC's Export Division. He will be involved in marketing DC's properties to over 24 foreign publishers. Harris will be abandoning his editorial duties and public relations responsibilities in order to achieve the move. His current editorial duties will shared among other DC editors.

● Michael Uslan and Ben Melniker have announced that Polygram and Universal Pictures have licensed the rights to make a movie out of ***THE SWAMP THING***, the award-winning DC comic book by Len Wein, Berni Wrightson, and Joe Orlando. The movie will be based on the concepts and characters created in the first ten issues of the comic.

● The new back feature in Mike Grell's ***WARLORD*** comic will be a continuation of Jack Kirby's ***KAMANDI*** series. The story will be written by Jack C. Harris, who was writing kKamandi's book at the time of its cancellation in 1978. The art chores are unassigned at present. Curiously, the material for the then-next two issues of ***KAMANDI*** (then inventoried and printed in the limited-edition ***CANCELLED COMICS CAVALCADE***) will not be used in the series' revival. Also, contrary to then-circulating rumors about the next couple of ***KAMANDI*** issues, Harris claims to have "no intention of telling the cause of the Great Disaster. I know what it is. Why should I tell you?"



SATURDAY MORNING VIEWS

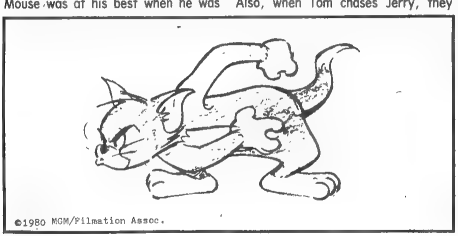
©1980 Lone Ranger Corp./Filmation Assoc.

by Claude Banff

Well, the new Saturday morning season has arrived, "not with a bang, but a whimper" (to quote Mr. Eliot). The main reason for this is the actor's strike which has crippled every facet of the entertainment business, animation included. For indeed, how can we enjoy our cartoon favorites when the voices of Fred Flintstone and Thundarr are out walking the picket line? With the strike winding down as I write this, it will still be several more weeks before ABC and NBC's Saturday morning schedules are running as originally planned. CBS, however, started its fall season right on schedule, with only a few of the returning series (***FAT ALBERT, TARZAN***) going into temporary reruns. This gives me the opportunity to make a more in-depth study of the new shows CBS is offering without a lot of channel-switching between NBC and ABC. A follow-up article on those networks' new shows will appear next issue.

Starting off the morning at 8 a.m. is the ***MIGHTY MOUSE & HECKLE AND JECKLE SHOW***, a half-hour abbreviated version of last season's ***M.M. & H. AND J. HOUR***. Same old stuff, improved, actually, by chopping it in half. I never could stomach Heckle and Jeckly for very long, and I always thought Mighty Mouse was at his best when he was singing opera, and punching the snot out of Oil-Can Harry, two things he is not allowed to do anymore. Unfortunately, the best segment in this show from last season, a ***"MIGHTY MOUSE IN SPACE"*** serial, has been dropped. Too bad. It often had funny scripts and some fair-to-middling animation.

Following Mighty and his pals at eight-thirty is a new series of Tom and Jerry cartoons in the ***TOM AND JERRY COMEDY SHOW***. If you liked the old Hanna-Barbera directed ***T&J*** theatrical shorts as well as the classic Tex Avery ***DROOPY***s, give this one a pass altogether. Produced by Filmation, the animation here is horribly stiff and choppy with none of the characters looking quite right. Tom, for instance, in several shots, has a head nearly half as big as the rest of his body, making him look like a freakish kitten. Also, when Tom chases Jerry, they both have these insipid grins on their faces, as if to say, "It's okay, kiddies, no one's really gonna get hurt!" Well, if no one's really gonna get hurt, why bring back Tom and Jerry at all? Oh, for the good old days of innocent homicide when Tom held Jerry down by his tail and hacked at him with an axe, or the final scene of the ***"TWO MUSKETEERS"*** where Tom is gruesomely beheaded in a guillotine. Well, at least the people at Filmation have remembered that Tom ***does*** chase Jerry, something that Hanna-Barbera forgot when they redid the characters as pals a few years ago. Also incorporated in Filmation's show is a segment featuring Droopy Dog, the laconic pooch created by Tex Avery, who somehow always managed to come out ahead of his enemy, the wolf. Meaning no disrespect to the master animator's memory, if Tex hadn't died a week before this new Droopy series' debut, seeing it would have planted him. It's Droopy vs. the wolf again, but the artwork and voices are too abominable to be described here. The pacing, direction and grasp of character that made the old cartoons a joy to watch are gone, and all we have left are six minutes of stock runs and silly faces. The popular misconception that most kids "like that sort of thing" must now be exploded, as the nine-year-old I was watching the cartoon with got quickly bored trying to figure out what the hell was going on and left to get



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himself a bowl of cereal. Filmation, who is responsible for the new ***MIGHTY MOUSE*** show too, is fast becoming the George Romero of Saturday morning, reanimating the likenesses of long-dead characters but not giving them the soul or wit that made them memorable in life.

After Tom and Jerry is ***BUGS BUNNY***, returning for this 1000th season on Saturday morning. Bugs is an ever-amusing reminder of what cartoons used to be. An interesting side note is that one of the reasons Bugs can be shown in all his violent, gory splendor is because these cartoons are what CBS considers "Animation Classics." What that term means, reading the networks literally, is that Bugs may smash Yosemite Sam on the head and get away with it because it happened in an old cartoon. But no studio can produce a similar cartoon showing the same action because impressionable kids are watching. What's the difference? If they keep running the old cartoons on Saturday morning, the kids are gonna keep seeing the same violence again anyway, and, naturally, Bugs Bunny will continue to bring in a better than forty share of the Saturday morning ratings as he's done for the last few seasons.

Pushing onwards, we encounter the ***ALL-NEW POPEYE HOUR*** (right after Bugs) at ten-thirty. This is a returning series made up of four cartoon segments featuring Popeye, Olive Oyl, Bluto and the other Thimble Theatre regulars, along with a new segment, ***"DINKY DOG,"*** another addition to the endless line of cute Hanna-Barbera bow-wows. The Popeye segments are innocuous as far as stories go (Popeye vs. Bluto with a minimum amount of violence again; like Tom and Jerry, nice animation done in Australia, ironically. Watching the Popeyes for three tralia. Watching the Popeyes for three weeks running leaves me with a feeling neither hot nor cold. Not even Nazi war criminals, however, should be made to suffer through ***"DINKY DOG."***

Eleven-thirty brings another Hanna-Barbera offering, ***THE DRAC PACK***, a new series and a bad idea from the word go. Studio thinking has always maintained that if a show is popular, it will be even more popular if a monster is put into it. Look at ***SCOOBY-DOO***, where a different, albeit phony, monster show up each week. A very successful show. I guess it was only a matter of time before someone turned out a show that was all monsters, and all monster good-guys to boot. (Anybody out there remember ***MONSTER SQUAD***?) So now we have ***DRAC PACK***, which are the three teenage descendants of Dracula, Wolfman and Frankenstein who have pledged to stand together to rid the world of evils. The evils they encounter come primarily from a secret group named OGRE (Organization of Generally Rotten Endeavors) whose members include the Toad (ripped right out of the original ***X-MEN*** with a costume change); Vampira, a lady ghoul who can turn

herself into a variety of nasty things including a snake and a spider; Mummy Man, a hulking, mumbling form wrapped in an Ace bandage; the Fly; and their leader, Doctor Dred, a namby-pamby villain who looks like Captain Hook and dresses like Truman Capote. His voice is even supplied by Hans Conried, which even further heightens the resemblance to Hook.

The main problem with ***DRAC PACK*** is that the characters are all too silly to care about. Drac and his buddies are basically goof-up teen-age monsters. OGRE is a group of funny-looking incompetents. They all chase each other around for thirty minutes, and who cares?!? The nine-year-old I had over that same morning remarked he could see no distinction between the good guys and bad guys and promptly went out to play. He had a point. Even the ***"GROOVIE GOOLIES"*** needed the Archies to work off of, and, though his traps never worked, we all knew that the Hooded Claw was quite serious about it when he went out time and again to snuff Penelope Pitstop. On the other hand, I always wound up rooting for the Claw, so what do I know?

Twelve noon is the new time for that Little Lord Fauntleroy of the ghetto, ***FAT ALBERT*** and his friends, back again in all-new episodes. A generally well-written show, ***FAT ALBERT*** is marred by two crucial factors: cheap animation and bad voices. Bill Cosby, who does the voices of the black kids, is always funny, but the others are downright embarrassing, particularly the female voices which always sound stoned and unemotional.

The rest of the afternoon belongs to Filmation from ***FAT ALBERT*** on. At twelve-thirty, the ***LONE RANGER*** rides our way, and, surprise! For a much-welcomed change of pace, we get a really fine show here. Lively scripts, some well-laid out animation, a good musical score (for Filmation, a real first) and the rich, mellow voice of William Conrad as the Ranger all combine to make this series a winner. After the ***LONE RANGER*** is a new season of jungle hi-jinks with ***TARZAN***, ever dull and boring as always. I'm not sure what's wrong with this series; the turgid scripts, or the actor's flat, monosyllabic delivery of same. Wish they'd let Tarzan loosen up a bit and have a little fun now and then. We could use it.

Next installment, an in-depth study of the new Saturday morning fare on NBC and ABC.•

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NEW INTEREST IN OLD ANIMATION

by Peter Sanderson

New York City's Thalia Theatre is currently running a three-month long festival of animated films every Monday night through November, following up the equally long festival it held this summer. The new series, entitled ***MORE CARTOONAL KNOWLEDGE***, consists of an entirely different collection of features and short subjects than this summer's ***CARTOONAL KNOWLEDGE***. But both festivals have in common their emphases on the work of Chuck Jones, Tex Avery, and Max and Dave Fleischer, along with programs featuring the work of Walter Lantz, Fritz Frelend, Bob Clampett and Otto Mesmer (the silent ***FELIX THE CAT***). Both festivals were programmed by Greg Ford, an authority on classic Hollywood animation who has written extensively on the subject in this country and Europe and who edited the memorable special animation issue of ***FILM COMMENT*** in 1975.

Ford has put together many animation festivals, usually entitled ***"The Hollywood Cartoon,"*** since his first for the New York Cultural Center in 1971-72, including a Tex Avery retrospective he assembled for the Zagreb Animation Festival (in Yugoslavia) and which later toured the Soviet Union. Ford also put together a series focusing on animators for New York's Museum of Modern Art. The Thalia festival, he says, is "much more extensive" than any he has done before, and has proved to be "extremely successful," so much that the Thalia has arranged this second three-month festival and will probably continue to run animated films in the future. Ford is happily surprised by the great enthusiasm of the audiences at the Thalia festival, and speculates that perhaps the length of the series made it possible for such a receptive audience to ences seem to be primarily in their twenties, Ford points out that nostalgia cannot be their only motive for coming, since so many of the cartoons he has run have not been played on television or extensively in theatres for many years. The audience for animation may still be small compared to the entire film-going audience, Ford thinks, but he believes it is growing and its interest in animation is an intense one

The most obvious gap in the festival's repertory is the absence of the Disney films. Ford explains that the problem is simply that the Disney people want too much money for renting the films. He has had requests for Jay Ward's Bullwinkle cartoons, but feels that most animation done for television looks inadequate up on a movie theatre's large screen. There were examples of European animation during the summer series, but Ford confesses he cares little for much of the animation done nowadays and prefers Hollywood animation of the late 1930s and 1940s. It is his belief that nothing developed since has surpassed the great strides in the art of animation made at the Disney studios between 1935 and 1942 and on view in ***DUMBO***, ***BAMBI*** and finally ***FANTASIA***. Chuck Jones and Tex Avery then developed what Ford terms "modernist" styles of animation by building upon the animation language developed at Disney, substituting their "expressively exaggerated extremes" for Disney's "natural fluidity." Today Ford believes we are in a "dry period in animation" with the Disney style having reached its "decadent" phase in the television animation of Hanna-Barbera. There is no longer an "evolving language of animation," says Ford: every animator, he thinks, is working in his own style without building upon anyone else's. Ford also admits a preference for "figurative drawing" and comedy in animated cartoons.

Getting the cartoons together for a festival can be difficult. Although virtually anything can be obtained for museum showings, there are restrictions on theatrical rentals. For example, Warners cartoons come from different sources. Their cartoons before 1948 are controlled by United Artists, which does not make everything available and sometimes offers only television prints. Cartoons after 1948 are controlled by Warner Classics, which offers only around fifteen prints in 35mm prints, including ***DUCK AMUCK***, ***ONE FROGGY EVENING*** and ***THE SCARLET PUMPERNICKEL***. It is virtually impossible to obtain prints of the cartoons licensed to CBS for its Saturday morning ***BUGS BUNNY/ROAD RUNNER SHOW*** for theatres.

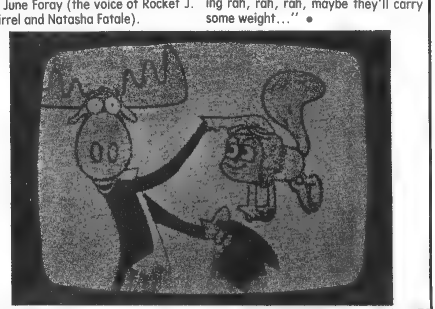
Ford is also a critic of live action films, and is one of the two programmers of the Thalia's current festival of films directed by or featuring Ida Lupino. He is planning eventually to write a book on the general subject of animation, and in the past he worked on a projected compilation film of Warners' cartoons entitled ***HARRPORT*** which, however, never got off the ground. •

JAY WARD DAY

THE LOS ANGELES TIMES reported that a formal "Salute to Jay Ward Studios" was conducted by the International Animated Film Society (ASIFA/Hollywood) and the Academy Foundation. Ward himself, creator/co-producer of ***CRUSADER RABBIT***, ***GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE***, and the ***ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE SHOW*** shows, a notorious recluse, was not in attendance, but his co-producer Bill Scott was, as were Hans Conried (the voice of ***"Dudley Do-Right"***'s nemesis Snidely Whiplash) and June Foray (the voice of Rocket J. Squirrel and Natasha Fatale).

In his address to the crowd, Scott recounted Ward Studios' latest three attempts to launch new series, and their abortive ***ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE IN THE STUPOR BOWL*** TV Special. "Then somebody happened to mention it to the National Football League," recounted Scott, "and the project was deemed 'not quite suitable at this time.'

"But now," he continued, "ABC has the hots to do a new ***BULLWINKLE SHOW***, so if you'll all write letters saying rah, rah, rah, maybe they'll carry some weight..." •



BUGS BUNNY SUPER-HERO?

©1980 DC Comics

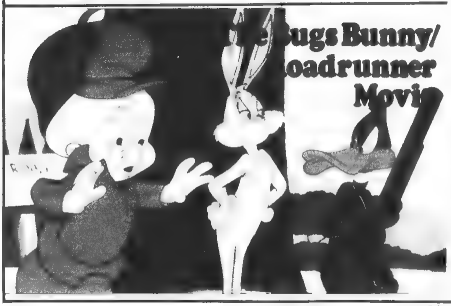
by Peter Sanderson

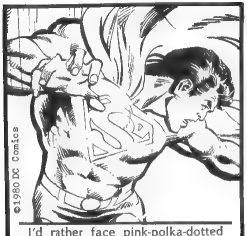
You've just read the title and are undoubtedly wondering how I can possibly draw a connection between two such radically different genres in cartoon art as Warners'-style funny animal animated cartoons and Marvel and DC super-hero adventures stories. Can Bugs Bunny possibly have anything in common with Spider-Man? Yes, they do. In fact, they are opposite halves of the very same coin.

Consider. Both engage in considerable and spectacular violence in the course of defeating their adversaries, enough to provoke the undying enmity of the folks at Action for Children's Television whenever they show their faces on Saturday morning television. You all probably already know that our moral guardians have forbidden the Thing from actually hitting anyone on television, but perhaps you are unaware of the rampant editing recently imposed on CBS's ***Bugs Bunny-Road Runner Show***, eliminating climaxes to gag sequences and sometimes reducing them to incoherence. It is all done so that younger viewers will not be corrupted the way ACT apparently feels we must have been by those violent superheroes and talking animals. This leads us to another connection between Bugs and Company and superheroes: there is something about them that is felt to be subversive of the established moral order. Yet despite the Werthams of the world uniting, superheroes survive and even find their way nowadays into the list of the top moneymaking movies of all time, while ***The B.B.-R.R. Show*** is number one in the Saturday morning ratings. Super-heroes and Warner animals are not just subversives, they are ***appealingly*** subversive. Warners animation director Chuck Jones, introducing his compilation film ***The Bugs Bunny-Road Runner Movie*** at last year's New York Film Festival, remarked that his cartoons had been accused of "smashing the ids" of children. "But that's why we're here," he added, and the audience, predominantly in its twenties and thirties if I recall correctly, burst into delighted applause.

Let's look at something else. Bugs does not simply try to overpower his opponent physically but also to make him look foolish. The "villain" of course looks pretty silly when Bugs arranges it so that his supposedly cleverly designed doom trap blows up in his own face (often literally), but these attacks on the "villain's" self-image are carried out in other ways as well. Elmer Fudd enters in his self-designated role of Mighty Hunter but within the next seven minutes is either reduced to remorseful but ludicrous tears by Bug's feigned death, thereby demonstrating his lack of will power to go through with killing animals (see Tex Avery's ***A Wild Hare*** or Jones' ***What's Opera, Doc?***), or is paralyzed with love for a supposedly beautiful woman who is actually Bugs in disguise, thereby making ridiculous what

Nothing can stop Bugs Bunny from becoming "Super Rabbit." Look out, Marvel & DC!

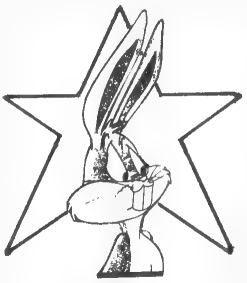




I'd rather face pink-polka-dotted Kryptonite than battle **BUGS!**

must be the opposite side of his wished-for macho hunter image, that of the great lover. (This is a recurring motif in Jones' Bugs cartoons, carried off most spectacularly in ***Rabbit of Seville*** in which Elmer ends up going to the opposite extreme, donning a bridal gown, and marrying his foe (Bugs), only to be carried over the threshold and unceremoniously jilted by being dumped headfirst into an enormous wedding cake!) Meanwhile Bugs likes to go in for namecalling behind his enemy's back (i.e. "What a maroon!" or, in ***Bully for Bugs***, "What an ultramaroon!"), casting aspersions upon his intelligence. In Jones' ***Operation: Rabbit***, in fact, Bugs' conflict with Wile E. Coyote explicitly serves the purpose of deflating the latter's claims to being a "super-genuis." (Notice the first half of that last word, by the way.) Wile E. tells Bugs at the cartoon's beginning that he may as well give up because he is too stupid ever to hope to outwit such a "genuis"—this seems to exasperate the rabbit more than Wile E.'s actual murder attempts on him—and at the end the thoroughly beaten Coyote returns to confess "My name is Mud," which, Bugs tells us, is "dum(b)" spelled backwards.

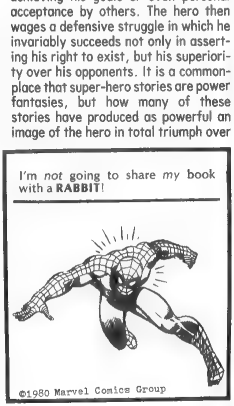
Super-heroes are not above making villains look silly, either: for example, there was a story once in which the Flash ended up not only disarming a pack of Rogues Gallery members, but stripping them of their costumes as well, leaving them in their underwear, looking considerably less imposing than usual. More often we see the super-hero who uses a constant stream of clever repartee to mock the villain while they are battling. Spider-Man and the Thing are most prominent examples today, and there are many others in comics history, like Batman and Robin up until the 1970s, and even, occasionally, the Spirit. The hero pokes fun at the villain's self-image of invincibility, power (machismo) and high intelligence, all of which the villain feels he has more of a claim to than the hero. Of course, whether the villain is Doctor Doom or Yosemite Sam he is ultimately proved to be lesser than the hero. Moreover, the heroes are perfectly correct in seeing something funny about the villain. There is something extreme about a Doctor Doom's inflated language and egotistical claims and his fits of rage that are



faintly ludicrous and not unlike the empty, self-deluding boasts of a Wile E. Coyote or the temper tantrums of a Yosemite Sam. Even the direct affronts to a villain's sense of his own masculinity we see in animated cartoons sometimes crop up in super-hero stories: Bugs plants mocking kisses on his enemies, and Spider-Man sometimes offhandedly insults a villain by calling him "sweetie."

In the course of this discussion we have been taking for granted another strong similarity between these animated cartoons and super-hero stories: they are all conflicts between good and evil, hero and villain, aggressor and potential victim. Not only that, but most often the conflict is for life and death stakes: Luthor wants to kill Superman, Doctor Doom wants to kill the Fantastic Four, Sylvester wants to kill (and eat) Tweety, Wile E. Coyote wants to kill (and eat) the Road Runner. The villain's reasons for his enmity usually begin with something understandable: hunger, in the case of the animals, or the super-heroes' obstruction of the super-villain's plans for knocking over a bank or conquering the world or whatever. Eventually, though, the original motive becomes irrelevant. Jones has often commented in print that the Coyote fanatically continues to strive after his goal even after he has forgotten what it is. After the umpteenth time that Doctor Octopus has fought Spider-Man, the former no longer needs a reason to kill the latter more than that he just ***can't stand*** the wall-crawling nuisance any longer, an attitude not very different from Yosemite Sam's unexplained credo "Ah ***hate*** rabbits!"

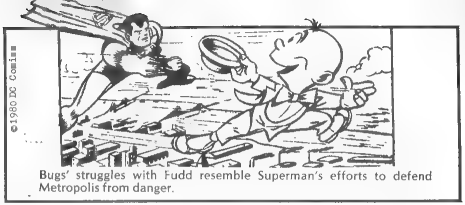
In either genre, then, the enemy is assaulting the hero's claims to being intelligent, capable of effective action, and indeed, even likable, and furthermore even challenging the hero's right to exist. Into this assault the comics reader or cartoon viewer can read any of his own frustrations in achieving his goals or even personal acceptance by others. The hero then wages a defensive struggle in which he invariably succeeds not only in asserting his right to exist, but his superiority over his opponents. It is a commonplace that super-hero stories are power fantasies, but how many of these stories have produced as powerful an image of the hero in total triumph over



his adversary as the end of Jones' ***Long-Haired Hare***, with Bugs, disguised as a conductor, a grim look in his eyes, bringing down an entire collapsing stage upon his now-helpless tormentor with a single hand gesture?

This structure is clearer in the cartoons than in the super-hero comics because super-heroes are often out to save their city or their world in the process of battling the villains, and hence are fighting on behalf of others as well as themselves. Usually the animals are leaping to the defense of others, much less patrolling a city looking for evildoers, and engage in combat only when provoked (hence the standard opening of a Jonesian ***Bugs Bunny*** in which the rabbit is peaceful and harmless until attacked, whereupon he declares "Of course you know this means war" and turns into an inescapable fury). On the other hand, if we view a super-hero's city or world as an extension of himself, his battles to defend the helpless citizenry (who, after all, so often appear merely as faceless masses in the stories) could be viewed as struggles to defend his personal territory from invasion: thus, beneath their altruistic surface, the stories center on the hero's defense of himself and of what is his.

The altruistic surface, however, is extremely important, for it is a genuine concern for the welfare of other people that keeps super-hero stories from going off the deep end into amoral, even fascistic fantasies. Another safeguard is the fact that in neither super-hero nor standard animated cartoons do characters usually get seriously hurt or die. Super-heroes and super-villains can wage tremendous battles and not even get bruised, and the indestructibility of cartoon animals is obvious. The fact in the cartoons that the hero only fights back when provoked acts as another safeguard. Presumably Tex Avery's Screwball Squirrel did not win the popularity of his other creations Bugs and Daffy Duck because the Squirrel went out to provoke fights in which he could demonstrate his own superiority in the process of trouncing a stupid but basically ineffectual adversary. Within these safeguards, the reader's or viewer's aggressive tendencies—his or her frustrated desires to lash out at whoever or whatever causes them problems—can run loose without arousing any guilt. A particularly good cartoon or heroic adventure should produce a comedic form of catharsis, relieving the readers or viewers of pent-up discontents and sending them back into the everyday world feeling happier. They can identify the hero's good qualities with their own, and experience his or her victory vicariously as theirs as well.



Bugs' struggles with Fudd resemble Superman's efforts to defend Metropolis from danger.

In either genre the hero triumphs through the use of his superior intelligence, although heroic adventurers also win success through their physical prowess. The heroes also have something else on thir side: super-powers, those qualities we may wish we had but could not in reality possess. Cartoon heroes often possess such powers, and I am not just speaking of obvious cases like Popeye with his superstrength. There is also the Road Runner with his super-speed. ***Road Runner*** cartoons are, to get to their essence, comedies about a super-fast being pursued by a mad scientist, and Wile E. Coyote is just about as doomed to fail in his efforts to capture and kill the Road Runner as the Mirror Master is with the Flash. Most cartoon animal heroes have the amazing ability to materialize props out of thin air: Bugs Bunny can duck around a corner and appear a second later garbed as Brunhilda complete with a real horse, and Screwball Squirrel can even conjure up a streetcar inside a narrow tree trunk. Some characters even manage to be in two or more places at once, like Avery's Droopy in ***Northwest Hounded Police*** or Jones' Sheepdog.

Super-hero stories imply that the world in which they are set is one in which the villain is inevitably doomed to fail, and thus, in short, is a true fantasy world. The suggestion is even stronger in something like the ***Road Runner*** series, in which the Coyote's continual efforts and defeats takes on a ritualistic feel. Indeed, the use of recurring heroes and villains and the same basic plot in both genres make super-hero stories and funny animal cartoons into reassuring, enjoyable rituals in which the self is continually reaffirmed and evil exorcised. This evil is not always located outside characters we identify with, either. To the extent we "love to hate" certain super-villains we have a sneaking sympathy for their greed and other qualities of theirs, but we reject those qualities in ourselves by acceding to and applauding their defeats. Similarly, in cartoons we can recognize the Coyote's incompetence or Daffy's greed and pretentiousness or Avery's Wolf's uncontrolled horniness in ourselves, and so sympathize with the characters, but nevertheless reject these qualities (at least in such extreme forms) in ourselves by taking gleeful pleasure in seeing the characters get their comeuppance.

So it should not really surprise anyone that Howard the Duck and Stewart the Rat mix with super-villains and superheroes, or that Bugs Bunny impersonates Superman (competently) in Jones' ***Super Rabbit***, or that Wile E. Coyote impersonates both Superman and Batman, incompetently, in ***The Bugs Bunny-Road Runner Movie***, or that Carl Barks and Floyd Gottfredson were able to fuse the funny animal comedy with the serious heroic adventure, complete with super-villains like Magica de Spell and the Phantom Blot. The super-hero adventure and the Warners'-style funny animal comedy tell the same story, but one does it as melodrama and the other does it as farce. •

The following interview was conducted in October 1980 at Cary Bates' office at Continuity Associates. It was conducted by Richard Howell and Carol Kalish, then transcribed by Kalish and edited by Howell. Cary Bates read and approved the final version.

Many thanks to Peter Sanderson for his last-minute assistance, and to Tony Dispoto for his help in arranging the interview date.

AN INTERVIEW WITH
CARY BATES

CF: We'd like to familiarize (or re-familiarize) our readers with how you got started in comics, lo these many years ago.

BATES: Well, I really got started when I started submitting covers to DC back in the '60s. Like so many other writers I really wanted to be an artist. They were badly drawn. They were swipes. They were colored. I kept sending them in to Mort [Weisinger] and Julie [Schwartz]. They started using them very early on. Back then they would give original artwork as... payment...

CF: Like a prize in a contest?

BATES: Well, more like payment. They wouldn't give you money, but they'd send you the original artwork. Back then nobody knew it was going to be worth anything and the artists weren't aware...

CF: That it was their property?

BATES: Yeah. And that was before the fan market even existed. So I got a lot of original covers in the early sixties. What I started to do next (which is the natural progression) was to give them little plot synopses to go with the cover. What happened after a while was that they liked my covers but didn't like the way I drew (it really wasn't very good), but they started liking the stories more than the covers. Gradually it got to the point where I thought, "What the Hell? Why don't I try a script on one of these ideas?" My first couple of scripts got rejected...

CF: About how old were you then?

BATES: This was around high school. This was all going on around my junior and senior years in high school. I started to experiment with writing late in my junior year. Ironically enough one of the first scripts I turned in (which got rejected) was based on a cover which Mort [Weisinger] later gave to Jim Shooter. Jim ultimately did the story. Shooter actually started with Mort before I did. So Mort was continually playing us against each other. He'd ask Jim why he couldn't do what I did and vice versa. The real truth was he was just playing us off each other. He was really giving us a hard time by using... by continuing to remind us of each other, trying to get us to do better, to do more, whatever he wanted us to do.

Around the fall of 1966 I went to college. I wrote a script that sold. Again this was with a cover that I drew. Over Christmas I wrote another one and that sold. After that Mort gave me a rate and I started to turn them out regularly.

CF: Do you remember what your first couple of stories were?

BATES: The first one that appeared was a ***WORLD'S FINEST*** story. I can't remember the title but Superman's and Batman's faces were blacked out and they had big question marks over their faces. It was an imaginary story.

CF: I remember that...

BATES: I think Batman was Luthor or something. The other one was a little better. Actually the cover was one of the best that I ever came up with. It was ***"The Real Clark Kent."*** This guy in chains and rags breaks into the Planet office and shining an X-ray beam at this ***other***

Clark Kent showing the Superman "s" while saying, "You've kept me locked up long enough. I'm the ***real*** Clark Kent." The story was lousy but I like the cover. That was the second of the first two stories... after that I started to work for Mort on an extremely regular basis.

CF: I knew that Julie Schwartz worked that way, but was it usual for Mort to have interesting covers prepared for writers to compose stories around?

BATES: Yes and no. Julie preferred doing covers first. With Mort I think it was more the case of ***if*** a cover idea presented itself or ***if*** they got one, they would write a story about it. But I think he was often in the position of trying to extract a cover from a story which is what I think DC does now most of the time. It's not that no one at DC likes that system, it's just that given the deadlines now, sometimes it's very difficult to take a day or two out and think up a cover. Julie and Carmine used to do that all the time for ***FLASH*** and a lot of the other characters. It has its drawbacks. I mean, sometimes it's good to have a scene which you hinge the story around. Other times you find you have to wedge the scene into the story because stories often go off on their own track.

CF: Yeah, sometimes the cover scene seems shoe-horned in...

BATES: Yeah, a lot of the old covers would be totally irrelevant dream sequences that were obviously stuck into the story to gallivate the cover.

CF: I remember a "Tunnel of Horrors" story in ***THE FLASH (#162)*** where Flash says, "No! You can't force me to go in there!!" and it was just a momentary impulse in the story.

BATES: Then I started working for Julie. I sold a story to Julie in which Julie appeared. It was just a coincidence, I wasn't using it as an angle to get him to buy.

CF: "FLASH: Fact or Fiction?"

BATES: Right, and he did buy it. I didn't do anything with Julie for several months after that. When Mort left, when Mort retired, I was sort of in a bad position because I had only worked with him. None of the other editors at DC knew me (let my alone my work) that much. Back then, DC was so segmented, each editor was like his own boss. They got very possessive about sharing their writers, characters... nothing like DC is today. So what I really had to do was virtually re-establish myself all over again with Murray Boltinoff and Julie.

CF: Simultaneously?

BATES: Yeah, I started to work for both of them. Now we're talking about 1969, 1970. By 1971 I was firmly re-established at DC in Mort's absence and I've been there ever since.

CF: When you were writing for Mort Weisinger back in the beginning did he ever establish guidelines for his stories to have?

BATES: Did he ever! Mort's kind of ship (for lack of a better word) doesn't exist anymore but it was very, very successful for very many years. It's easy to criticize him but his track record remains. What he did was that he would literally plot the stories with the writer to the point where he was almost giving the writer the plot. To be exact, back in those days there were no credits given in the books so his was the only name that was actually associated with the ***SUPERMAN*** books. So that was what he would do. He was virtually the entire ***SUPERMAN*** line. He had his seven books for twenty or thirty years. He was a genuis at creating gimmicks that would perpetuate the Superman myth. Things like Kandor and the Legion [of Super-Heroes], both of which were originally only one-shot story gimmicks. He didn't know what they'd turn into. It's like what Julie did with that Flash story where he introduced Joy Garrick. Little did he dream what it would turn into. Earth-Two was not expected to turn into what it has become now. There was no way of knowing what you were creating then because you couldn't look into the future to see what would evolve from it.

CF: It was just a good idea at the time.

BATES: Yeah. And there are a lot of other good ideas that have just fallen by the wayside, that have never been developed, but they're still there. Working for Mort was a real experience because he was the toughest editor in every espect as far as working with freelancers.

CF: You didn't know that?

BATES: Well, see, here I was in Ohio and he was the only editor I had any contact with. He was buying my stuff and paying me money...

CF: And you had nothing to compare him with...

BATES: And you've got to remember that except for Shooter who was considered a fluke (not only because he was the only other newcomer but he was also something like 13, three years younger than myself) there were no other writers my age or in my predicament to compare notes with. I just assumed that that must be what it's like. It was only later that I learned that every editor wasn't like that. This isn't to say that everything about Mort was negative. He taught me a lot, but he was very rough. I think the thing I remember him best for was plotting. I learned much of that from him. And having worked for him first, I was able to take things better because I had had such a rigorous entrance in the business. Sometimes starting with the toughest is the best way, if you can survive it. I think Shooter is a better person too, because even though they had a falling-out, he learned a lot

and it kind of toughened him, too.

CF: Shooter credits Weisinger with forming his ideas of what a good story is and what sells to the market.

BATES: Yeah, Mort definitely had that knack.

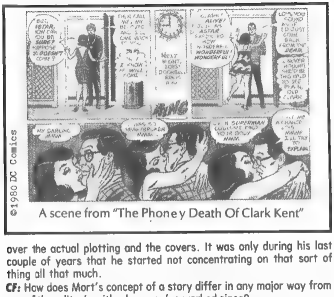
CF: What exactly would Mort do to a script you submitted? You said that he would work with you on strengthening the plot.

BATES: Well, he mostly worked with you before the script was written because he would practically spoon-feed the plot to you. He liked to have a very tight rein on exactly what the story was, exactly what the tone of it was.

CF: And he'd tell you exactly why he wanted these elements there?

BATES: Yeah, we really couldn't vary it very much.

I think during his last three or four years at DC Mort wasn't doing all that much actual editing himself, but he kept a very tight control



A scene from "The Phone y Death Of Clark Kent"

over the actual plotting and the covers. It was only during his last couple of years that he started not concentrating on that sort of thing all that much.

CF: How does Mort's concept of a story differ in any major way from any of the editor's with whom you've worked since?

BATES: Well, Mort's and Julie's concepts aren't really all that different. It's hard to put this in words...They're similar because they come from similar backgrounds and were both SF fans.

I think the basic thing that Mort lacked in his basic story concept (or didn't feel was important) was characterization. His characters after a while were locked into certain stereotypes.

CF: Just affectations, they really didn't have personalitites.

BATES: Yeah. There were a few times he allowed characters to get out and really emote beyond the shackles he imposed on them. But more often than not you didn't see that in his stories.

CF: And it's strange because the few times he did allow it...well, one example was the **"Phoney Death of Clark Kent" (SUPERMAN #210)**. Nelson told us that they got phenomenal mail response on that story. They just didn't follow it up.

BATES: Yeah. I think that all through the years that I've been there stories that get the sharpest response have to do with emotions, whether the response is positive or negative. The mail I got after we killed Iris—I'd never seen mail like that. Some of it was hate mail, some of it was really glad she was dead, and some of it was just agitated. They wanted to kill us, but they were hooked. They had to keep reading to see if it was real or not; and if it **was** real, how did it happen and why did it happen. I learned then that you could please them more successfully by agitating them than giving them what they wanted.

CF: As long as there was some kind of emotional content to the stories...

BATES: Exactly. If there is nothing in the story that you can emotionally hook onto then you really have a story formula that may work for a while but I can't see it continually bringing the reader back.

BATES: I think that's what happened towards the end of Mort's reign. His stories had worked for a long time, but they had gradually become formularized. They were almost predictable

CF: There was at least one story during Mort's tenure which they used twice without changing any of the elements. **(ACTION #281)**.

BATES: Yes, very blatantly.

CF: Do you think that one of the reasons readers are so strongly attracted to the more emotional type of gratification than to the more plot-oriented, more traditional "Mort" approach, is that there is a limit to the gimmicks and plot convolutions you can go through, but you can always milk an emotional crisis in a different way.

BATES: Yeah, I think that's right. Like I said, Mort was a genius in finding all these permutations in the Superman myth that no one had ever thought of before and that were springboards for dozens and dozens of stories, but I think that in addition to the gimmicks you need the emotional content to have something to identify with. Those kinds of things are universal whereas readers who weren't into the **SUPERMAN** legend wouldn't be as impressed or interested in one of these little...

CF: Continuity gambits...

BATES: Yeah, Yeah! Whereas a new reader could really be bowled over by the emotional content even if he had never read the history of Kandor or knew what the Bizarro World was. Whereas these other things presuppose some kind of knowledge or familiarity with what had been established. For readers that are into those sorts of things, those stories are great. They can refer to earlier stories and every time a new nugget of information is established in the **SUPERMAN** legend they could say, "That explains that!" and they could add it to their mental encyclopedia. Even Mort, I think, realized in the last few years he was editing that that wasn't always the way to go. He kept telling me to write stories the way Shooter was writing them. Those stories had very little to do with the traditional Superman staples. I think he was realizing even then that there was a different direction in which he could go.

CF: They tended to be a little heavier in characterization, too.

BATES: Yes, Yes. Jim was probably the first writer with Mort to start that. I think Mort was even actively seeking stories that didn't refer to the **SUPERMAN** legend or that didn't tell us about one of the kinds of Kryptonite that never existed. He would say, "I want a general story" (that was his term for it). I think that was something he realized after a couple of decades.

CF: You had a couple of other one-shot assignments. You wrote one **WONDER WOMAN**?

BATES: I wrote a couple for Kanigher. I've virtually written every character they have essentially just because of the years I've been here. I even did some romance stuff which was not my favorite thing to do, but it was interesting. I think everything I've done has helped me in general because it's experience.

Every writer should be affected by things outside of comics. I think it's valuable to deal with every genre within comics, too. You get to know how the genres cross over. What I learned from romance comics I've since applied to the romantic situations in **SUPERMAN** comics. You can always find references in one kind of story to another. There is just so much cross-pollination.

CF: What kind of things do you read outside of comics? You just mentioned that a comics writer shouldn't just draw from the comics tradition.

BATES: I don't get it from reading as much as I get it from films. My main influence has always been films and I think that is my main influence as far as my writing. I've always put far less emphasis on words and captions than I do on visuals. I think as far as comics go I think film is a far more valuable impetus than prose because there is so much more in film that can be applied to comics. There are probably a number of fine novelists who couldn't write a decent comic book to save their lives. A good analogy of mine is that a comic book page is virtually reading a strip of film and knowing which frames to cut out and which to leave in in order not to interfere with the story. Between two comic book panels there are a number of panels that have to be left out. The writer has to know which panels can be deleted. He has to be able to subtly juxtapose them in such a way as for the reader to understand what had to have happened between those two panels. A trick I've been doing for years is having a large number of panels left out that the readers are unaware I've left out. I imply that things have happened and the readers piece together what must have happened in the missing panels. I can do much more complicated plots that way than in the Mort Weisinger days where you had to spell everything out. What I do now in order to get my plots in 17 pages is take shorthand almost, either visually or plotwise. The reader has to put it together in his head even though it's only implied on the page. If you look for something that explains it all in black-and-white you can't always find it. It's a trick I've been using because a lot of the plots I've been doing in 17 pages are really too intricate to do. Nobody complains about this because they don't notice what's happening. If they don't notice what they're forced to do then the trick is succeeding. They're unconsciously formulating what I've implied.

CF: They're providing the filler for the gaps, they're envisioning the cut panels...

BATES: Yeah. And they aren't even aware that they're doing it. You have to be careful because if you're too intricate you can go over their heads. What I'm always trying to do is to find that balance be-

tween a plot that's too complicated to understand and a plot that is spelled out.

CF: A good example of that type of plotting is your recent **"Bride of Luthor" (ACTION #510-2)** storyline...

BATES: Yeah, that plot was too complicated to spell out directly. It would have taken up too much space, but I squeezed everything in (including a series of clues and the solution) by collapsing everything. I made the reader work with me. The story was interesting so the reader figured out what was going on in the plot...

That was an incredibly complex plot and a lot of it was left out. If you had to summarize that plot on paper, you wouldn't be able to find it in the panels because it just isn't there.

AS FOR THE EMOTIONAL MAIN ANCHOR IS HERE PLAN—YOU VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED IT IN YOUR EFFORTS TO STRIPPING THE ORIGINAL AMBIGUITY PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE
...DWARLING YOU, TO THE CORE, WHAT I MUST BE, HAD ALWAYS ADMIRED AND LOVED
IF THE FOLLOWING 3-WEEK HIATUS WERE ERRONEOUSLY PROTRAYED BY SOME OF THE DEMOLISHED READERS AS PRE-PRODUCTION
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STORY, WHERE AGAINST THE AMERICAN DOWN LIFE THE METAPHYSICAL REALITY AND A CRISIS OF PERSONALITY
THE MICROSCOPIC GRAMMAR OF THE CLASSIC DETECTIVE STORY
CRITICISM OF THE STRUCTURE BY JACQUES BRIENNE

The Bride of Luthor: "That plot was too complicated to spell out directly... but I squeezed everything in... by collapsing everything. I made the reader work with me."

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CF: As long-time mystery ***and*** comics readers we caught the clues and figured out most of the plot...

BATES: It's funny, out of all the letters we received on the first and second issues, only one person figured out what was going on. The same thing with **"The Return of Jonathan Kent" (ACTION #507-8)**. That is a really satisfying feeling. I figure that if the readers are ahead of me I'm not doing my job. One thing I always try to do in my stories is to not let the reader get ahead of me. They might think they're ahead, but then I pull a switch and show them they're not. I used to always get a kick out of that when I was reading comics. I think one of the reasons I lost interest was after a while the writers couldn't do that to me anymore. I knew all the tricks, I knew all the formulas. There was nothing to keep me there.

CF: One of the things about your recent **"Bride of Luthor"** story, is one of the things that seems very difficult to do as far as the Superman stories are concerned is that there is a really limited room to maneuver the character progression. The Marvel style is pretty much predicated on having characters die, etc., and not much of that shifting is allowed in the ***SUPERMAN*** line. It does seem to be a particularly difficult assignment. The ***SUPERBOY*** comic even more so. And on the **"Bride of Luthor"** story we had bets going about whether or not Luthor was really going to reform or marry this woman. Do you feel constrained that you can't always do these, um, "Marvel-style" progressions?

BATES: Not really. I've always accepted some things as givens. I can't really **focus** my stories on any problems that just can't be resolved (like Lois and Superman's ever-delayed marriage), but I can make use of whatever opportunities come along in that respect. Those things come up once in a while—like the scene in the **"Pa Kent"** story with Pa and Lois. That got a tremendous response. Now whenever we refer to that relationship we have to do it on two levels, one where she knows Clark and Superman are the same and the other she doesn't. The reader is in a **"Lady-and-the-Tiger"** situation. You never really know now. I think that tantalizes the reader. There is now a mystique to Lois' character that differentiates her from Lana even more so than her personality already does. There are ways like that to infuse new tensions in old established relationships. Those ideas unfortunately don't come up too often because they're very elusive.

I'm not even sure if there are that many of them left. But when they do, it's great.

CF: Speaking of the differences between Lois and Lana's personalities, back in the '60s there didn't really seem to be that great a gulf between them. I think the Marty Pasko-written issues were the ones that established the differences between them.

BATES: I think that absence of Lana's was very good because it gave us a chance to ***almost*** do her all over again. What's happened now is that it's very clear that she is a more ambitious, egocentric, outgoing girl than Lois is, more into the "star system." Now that she realizes there is no future for her and Superman, she's gotten even more independent, even tougher than Lois in some ways. By no means can you interchange their characters now. I think because of her understanding with Superman, the idea that there can never be anything between them, she's more interesting. Another thing we've been getting a lot of response on is her relationship with the Vartox figure who keeps coming in and out. Again that's something we couldn't have done if she were still chasing Superman.

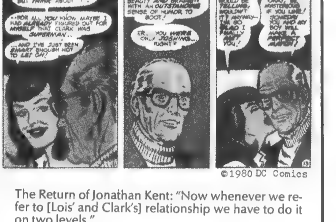
CF: Let's see, you've got the ***SUPERMAN*** book which is mainly focusing on the WGBS news show and Marv [Wolfman] is doing the ***Daily Planet*** stories?

BATES: Well, that was more the original conception when it started soon after the movie. What's happened now is that Clark's in both settings, however impossible that is. It was an effort to make the movie make sense because up to then we had nothing about the Planet in the series. I think that a lot of people, myself included, missed the ***Daily Planet***. To have totally removed him was a mistake. The situation now just gives us more opportunities, more settings for the stories.

CF: Do you prefer working with the newsroom staff?

BATES: I choose the supporting characters more on the situation of the story than anything else. If the story is good for the TV group, in they come. If it's more newspaper, out go the TV guys and in comes the ***Planet***.

CF: It seems that over the last year you've been doing the Lana/TV stories and Marv has been doing the Lois-oriented/Planet stories. Do you think that affects the tone of the stories any?


YOU'RE HAPPY, AIR HEAD! BUT THINK ABOUT IT!
...HOW DO YOU KNOW, MAYBE HE'S ALREADY TOLD HER ABOUT HIMSELF AND SHE WAS JUST PRETENDING!
...AND I'VE JUST BEEN GIVEN ENOUGH HER TO ABET SUICIDE!
WELL, I'M SO SWITCHED AROUND I'M NOT SURE BOTH I'M EXTRAORDINARY SENSE OF HUMOR TO BOOT!
ER... YOU WANNA CALL JOURNEY... HUNH?
NOW THAT YOU'RE FEELING BOUYANT AGAIN, WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME WHAT'S REALLY BOTHERING YOU?
GAWD, WHAT A DUMB QUESTION! IF YOU LIKE! I'LL BE GLAD TO TELL YOU HOW I'VE BEEN BOTHERED BY THE PROBLEMS OF MY BEST FRIEND!

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The Return of Jonathan Kent: "Now whenever we refer to [Lois' and Clark's] relationship we have to do it on two levels."

BATES: Whenever you have more than one writer doing a character you are going to have tone shift problems. Whether it's better to avoid having tone-shift problems by having one writer do one character and another doing the other... that might just add to the problem. I think the best guideline is the one we've been using. There are no hard and fast rules about character use. If you're doing a story that requires Lana, then you get Lana. But I think generally we have divided the two characters up as you mentioned.

CF: Do you have general character sketches which either Julie keeps or all the writers know about?

BATES: I don't think we need them. Julie, Marv and I know the characters so well that we don't need guidelines. It's like what hap-

pened with the ***Mary Tyler Moore Show.*** After three or four seasons, anyone could have written the lines for the characters: you knew what they were going to say before they said it. The ***characters*** worked as defined personalities. It's the same way with the ***SUPERMAN*** cast. They've been so well-defined, especially in the last ten years, that I don't think there is much confusion as to what their personalities are like.

CF: So you don't see any significant variation between the Superman in ***ACTION*** and the Superman in the title book?

BATES: Oh, yes, I do. But I don't think that's caused by different interpretations of the characters used. I think it's caused by the differences that the various writers bring to the strips. My stories are different from Pasko's. A writer puts an imprint on a story. A reader who is really up on following the books could probably identify a writer without a credit. Maybe not as easily as an inker, but after a while you can do that.

CF: Speaking of a writer putting his imprint on the books, investing the books he writes with his own characteristic touches, does Julie act as co-ordinator of the ***SUPERMAN*** mythos?

BATES: Pretty much. With regards to specifics and facts we go to Nelson, he's like a walking encyclopedia as far as that goes. What they finally realized about three or four years ago was that while it probably wasn't a good idea to have one guy handle all seven ***SUPERMAN*** books, it was a good idea to have all the main titles under one editor's control. So they consolidated the four main titles under Julie. That way the books have more consistency.

I think that was a very good move because the stories I do for Murray Boltinoff and the stories I do for Julie are very different. In this business you are paid to give the editors what they want.

CF: Is the editor guided by what he thinks is the commercial desires of the audience?

BATES: Yeah, like I think that if we had made up a fake name for me when I was writing ***THE FLASH*** for Ross, I bet that most readers wouldn't have been able to recognize me. The stories were so markedly different from what I had been doing. What I think Len is doing now is taking the best elements of what Julie did, and taking what Ross and I did in terms of continuity and injecting some realism, and combining the best of the two different approaches. I hope that the readers will agree with me.

CF: About the stories that dealt more in the emotions of the characters than the gimmicks, have you noticed (as we have) a change in the stories which you have been writing over the past two or three years?

BATES: Yes, I have. About two, two-and-a-half years ago, I made a conscious effort... almost an experiment... to knock myself out over every story. I tried to put more of myself into the stories. I realized that up until that time I had been coasting in the stories I was writing, based on my own terms. They weren't up to the standards I knew I was capable of, and I just wanted to see if I did this and didn't tell anybody, if anybody would notice. And the letters—I have to go by letters and what people tell me—the letters have indicated that it has been noticed

CF: How about sales?

BATES: I know they're good. I know for a fact that sales of ***THE FLASH*** went way up when we has the ***"Death of Iris"*** series.

CF: Is there any indication if that was a reflection of the plot line or a general upgrade of story content

BATES: I think they've just about decided it was the plot because Len and I are making a more concerted effort to increase continuity again. We have a plotline running now that is even more spell-binding, for lack of a better word, than the Iris thing. You haven't seen it yet. I think the continuity has a lot to do with it. The ***SUPERMAN*** stories are generally not continual serials, but I've been trying to do things that not only are entertaining but are emotionally involving, that show sides of Superman that have never been shown before. I tried to extract what I thought made Mort's stories work. And tie them into the 1980s consciousness with the expectation for characterization.

CF: What are the personal favorites of yours?

BATES: Recently, the ***"Jonathan Kent"*** stories and the ***"Luthor"*** stories in ***ACTION***. Some of the ***FLASH***es I've done with Carmine [Infantino] look very fine. If there is any one artist associated with one character it's Carmine and the Flash. I think he made ***THE FLASH*** what it is. You can separate other artists from characters but it's very hard to do it with him—not to criticize the other artists who have been doing it after Carmine left, but they haven't really been able to capture what he created. It was such a unique character and such a unique style. His whole style is so suited to that one concept. The re-

"I THINK THAT IF WE HAD MADE UP A FAKE NAME FOR ME WHEN I WAS WRITING THE FLASH FOR ROSS, I BET THAT MOST READERS WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RECOGNIZE ME."
WHAT IF ASSAILANT UNKNOWN DID? HOW CAN THIS BE?? ZOOM SAID?
HE'S TAKING ME FOR A FOOL, USING IRIS'S MURDER AS BAIT--
IRIS WEST ALLEN DECEASED MARCH 29, 1979 ASSAILANT UNKNOWN
MURDER INSCRIBED
©1980 DC Comics
--MANIPULATING ME INTO TAKING OFF ON A WILD GOOSE CHASE THROUGH TIME-- TO KEEP ME OCCUPIED...
WHILE HE'S FREE TO DO GOD KNOWS WHAT IN CENTRAL CITY

action to the pages he's done so far has been like being in a time warp. It's like it's 1969 again or earlier. (I've forgotten when he quit now.) I think these past ten years, as I've written the ***FLASH*** I've always imagined it as if he were pencilling. Now to see it on the page just as I've imagined it... sometimes it's even ***better*** than I imagined it would look.

CF: Would you say you are more satisfied with the stuff that you're turning out now than your previous work?

BATES: Yeah, I would.

CF: How would you characterize your favorite writers within the industry—just to give us a rough idea of what you look for in a story?

BATES: The main thing I look for in a story is something that pulls me in without having pre-knowledge of the character. I think I read fewer comics than most of my peers because I'm not a fan. I haven't been a fan since about 1965. I had been gradually losing interest throughout high school and if I hadn't started selling things I probably would have dropped out entirely, but having sold things, I found myself becoming interested on a different level. I think in a way that's been an advantage because one of the pitfalls a writer can fall into is being a fan and being too close to things, having the mentality that you are writing for the specialized group who have the same interests you do. I think it's my non-fan mentality that allows me to write a story for the mass audience, the readers with no presupposed knowledge about the material. The stories that I read and respond to are stories that I don't need to know anything about the Marvel Universe in order to get involved. To give you specific examples of what I like or don't like would be very tough because I read comics only sporadically. I think, in general, unless you are assured of having a book that appeals to a large specialized audience, and the Marvel books apparently do...

CF: The "fan favorites" certainly do.

BATES: I think you're running into trouble writing a story with that sort of slant to it. I think that Mort instinctively knew that, but we've gotten away from it a good deal. I think it's caused by the enthusiasm of the business: you're so sequestered and closed off from the rest of the world, you assume after a while that everyone shares your specialized interests. But you're really missing the boat that way because comics were never originally conceived for that kind of segmented audience. They were meant to have appeal to a massive audience.

Obviously I'm not regarded as some writers are, who are no better or worse as writers but are more revered in the fan circles because the fans can obviously tell that the material is obviously pointed towards them, where my approach has always been to think of the more general reader. If a story works for a general reader then it should work for a fan, too. It if succeeds on one level, it has to succeed on the other.

CF: There's no reason why it shouldn't. Craft is Craft.

BATES: Yes, but on the other hand if a story succeeds on a fan level, it could totally fizzle with a general reader because you're catering to those specialized people and you're missing the general one.

To have the conceit that a reader is going to pick up this book and be so anxious to read what happened in the last seven issues, when in reality the reader often has to be convinced to buy the book in the first place, is unrealistic. He's going to flip through the book and there's going to have to be something to catch his interest. A compression of four preceding issues isn't going to do that. You have to pretend that the reader is being won over for the first time every time you write a book. I think that's the attitude you have to have. I don't care how much you have to explain, you have to find a way to give it to the reader so he doesn't know he's digesting it. It has to be snuck in there. That's something that I think has been missed quite often in these continuing storylines. You look at ***FLASH***, which is the most serial-oriented thing I ever did, the most Marvel-oriented thing I ever did, because that really ran like twelve or thirteen issues. We tried to write each story so that we wouldn't have to tell the reader everything that happened the issue before. We gave them just enough to keep the momentum of the story going.

CF: Would you say the Marvel-oriented influence, as you called it, came from Ross Andru?

BATES: Only in the sense that Marvel sort of pioneered the idea of a story running over many issues. Having a major character going through a catharsis like that.

CF: Actually I think that the long serial involving Supergirl's existence being revealed to the world (***ACTION #278-285***) was the first time that a continued story was tried.

BATES: Yeah, I guess Mort invented that, too.

CF: Speaking of new things to do with a character... how do you come up with new ideas? You've been working on ***THE FLASH*** and ***SUPERMAN*** for years...

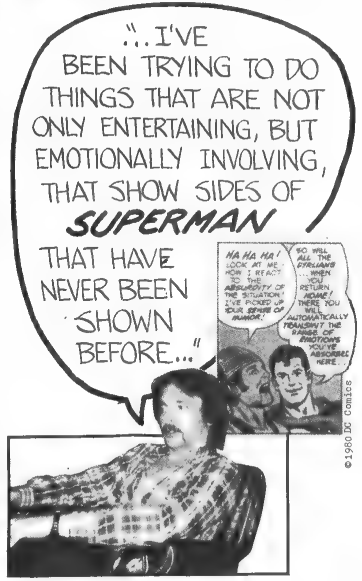
BATES: Fourteen years, altogether.

CF: You're the senior ***SUPERMAN*** writer and crank them out month after month; how do you keep from going stale?

BATES: I think it's precisely because I've done it so long that it's now second nature for me to try and find things that have never been done. I think it's a case of becoming so familiar with something that you don't have to manufacture ideas, they just spring from what you know about the character. It's very rare that I'm stuck totally for an idea. I think it's a very good idea to be on books for long stretches if you can use the familiarity as a positive force as opposed to it being a boring exhaustion; I think it depends a good deal on your attitude. So far I've been able to use my familiarity as a plus factor; if that ever changes it'll be time for me to move on to something else.

CF: Is it because you are so familiar with the characters that you've come to know them...

BATES: I think that's partially it. I grew up with Superman. I read the


"...I'VE BEEN TRYING TO DO THINGS THAT ARE NOT ONLY ENTERTAINING, BUT EMOTIONALLY INVOLVING, THAT SHOW SIDES OF SUPERMAN THAT HAVE NEVER BEEN SHOWN BEFORE..."
HA HA HA! LOOK AT ME... HOW I REACT TO THE ABSURDITY OF THE SITUATION! I'VE PICKED UP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR.
SO, WILL ALL THE EXPLANS WHEN YOU RETURN HOME! THERE YOU WILL AUTOMATICALLY TRANSMIT THE BASICS OF ANOTHER YOU'VE ASSIMILATED HERE.
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comics, watched the TV shows, wore a costume. The Flash, though, was my favorite super-hero. Of all the characters I have read, those are the two that affected me the most. I think that might be part of it. I've always had an innate connection with the characters. They're not just an assignment; they're enjoyable to write.

I never tire of Superman or the Flash for that matter. I think the reason is that I've been doing it so long that I'm constantly trying to go beyond what I've done. It's hard to start work on a new character. It's easy for me to extend myself because I've been on the books so long. The fact that I continually have to fight with being bored with them forces me to experiment and do things that are difficult—and don't always succeed, but at least I'm trying. I know that I'm certainly more comfortable with the characters I write, probably because I've worked with them so long. But also Superman is an archetype and I seem to gravitate more to archetypes than anything else.

I hate group books. I think it's far more challenging to do a book with a single character than to do a book with eight or twelve characters. There are a lot of reasons, but I think Flash is an archetype, too, because he was the first of the revival heroes. He started the whole ball rolling again. So I've been very lucky to be associated with characters that are up there on a pedestal. I'm also going to be working on ***THE LONE RANGER*** strip for the New York Times Syndicate. He again is an archetype. I've had some success selling material on James Bond—he again is an archetype. And I've tried to sell material on Dirty Harry—he again is an archetype. So I find myself drawn—gravitating to each genre's typical character. The figures that started the whole ball rolling. Those are the characters I enjoy the most.

I seem to have this tendency to use archetypes. I've become an expert at simulating the Bond in the films—not so much in the books—but I'm able to do that now almost as easily as I do Superman. I've devoted so much time and study to it. The same with Dirty Harry. I was able to analyze it in the first movies and figure out what made Harry work and what people wanted to see Harry do.

It's a problem because there are hundreds of people writing ***DIRTY HARRY*** treatments. The competition is really rough. But if you try for something original, you face the other problem. You're all alone, you have to convince everybody that the idea's sound.

The only real thing to know about the film is that anything goes. The carrot dangling before me is that if I make one major sale, I'm automatically in. At least, I'd get another assignment. By the same token if you've been there for thirty years and you have one huge bomb, you're almost automatically out. It's a very fickle business in that sense. I'm constantly looking for that one big score.

CF: So your career goals are not really with comics? Comics are more than just your current profession.

BATES: Well, I really think that I reached a level that I'm trying to maintain but I don't really know if I can surpass it; I think I'm pretty much at my comics peak now. I don't think the industry, at least in its current state, will uncover new uncharted areas in terms of creativity unless there is a radical change in the format but I don't see it happening in the immediate future. My aspirations are in film. Money is part of it, too, but my dream has always been to go into movie scripting. It's like seeing your name in print but a hundred times better. Of course, I haven't seen it yet so I can't tell you for sure.

CF: What type of rapport do you look for with your artist?

BATES: Well, I don't really have that much direct contact with them. Most of the artists I work with are happy with my scripts. They like the way I think in visual terms. They can see that I'm putting them in the forefront as far as the story is concerned. In other words, I don't like the old saying that writers put in a lot of captions because they're not sure that the artists will carry the mood and story. The artists ***have*** to do that! That's what comics are all about—they're a ***visual medium***. You have to rely upon the artist. I'm always trying to think of the artist first. You have to write the story on a number of levels: you have to design it so that a casual newsstand purchaser can stand there and flip a few pages and be struck by the visuals on each page, and then you have to compose a story that a reader can really get involved with once he buys the book and goes home. If you can have a story that's visually exciting and has a good plot, then you have a remarkable comic. If you can then do a story that has those two elements ***and*** says something between the lines, has a message, ***then*** you really have something.

But I think one of the considerations a writer should always keep in mind is what the artist has to put down on paper. That's why I hate to give an artist something that's impossible to do or not interesting to do. I'm always trying to think of some shtick or angle he can use if the scene is visually stagnant and potentially boring to the reader. I like to use the artist to get across plot points by having the artist do close-ups or long shots or close-focus on some point key to the story. I try and have the ***artists*** give the precious piece of information. I don't want the readers dependent on the captions and the dialogue for all their information: the visuals should ***show*** the story just as much as the words ***explain*** it.

"IN REAL LIFE, DEATH DOESN'T HAPPEN AFTER A LONG SERIES OF DRAMATIC INCIDENTS THAT BUILD UP TO IT... IRIS REALLY WAS DEAD... THERE REALLY WAS DEATH."
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CF: You mentioned that you wanted to start as an artist and also that you are very interested in films. Do you think that might have influenced the way you view the artist?

BATES: I think my fascination with films has helped me tremendously insofar as visually pacing a story. My work with the Broccoli people has taught me to space the visual elements so that they come in bumps. It's a formula of visual element-story element progression-action-visual element, etc. I try to consciously do that two or three times every page. It's a rapid pace that keeps your interest up. It keeps you wanting to turn the page, keeps you interested, keeps you reading. The movies have also taught me how long a scene should last, the pacing of the story, how to balance the exposition and the action. That's very valuable in comics writing.

CF: What are the demands the industry makes on someone like you

who seems concerned about maintaining your professional attitude?

BATES: Well, it's like always being late on your homework. It's not like having a real job. I'm doing more now, just bulk-wise, than I was doing, say, four or five years ago. The pressure to always produce what averages out to be one story a week, week in, week out, year after year... forget it. If you think about it like that you're going to get, well... almost disgusted. So you look at it ***one*** story at a time. I find myself often hating it, especially the last five pages of a story. I hate finishing a story—maybe because it means that..I'll have to start another one. But other times I love doing it, I enjoy the writing. You just have to be able to ride the ups and downs, always deliver, and always be dependable.

CF: In that respect it sounds like any other job.

BATES: Except in one respect: you have to reach a certain level of competence. When you're hacking... no, not hacking... when you're not doing your utmost (this is one of my definitions of a professional) if only ***you*** know your stories are not up to par—if only ***you*** can tell, then you've succeeded in reaching this level of competence. Because if other people can come up to you and say you were off with that story or you were tired or whatever, then I don't think you've done your job. So many times I've turned in stories that I wished I had done, I knew I ***could*** have done, a little more, but no one else knew that. In that sense I think you have to reach that level of competence, that level of reliability in this business.

On the other hand, there's occasionally the story which you think is terrific and nobody likes it. That happens too.

CF: Has it happened recently to you?

BATES: Well, all I go by is the mail, and I must say that during the last two years the stories I've liked, the mail has borne me out. I have to be happy with a story before I turn it in. If I don't like it, I usually have a lot of trouble with it. I tinker and try to fix it. It'll only give you ulcers if you're working on a story and all the way through it you're saying, "This is no good! This won't work!"

CF: I guess one of the drawbacks of the business is that since you have to turn in a series every week you don't have the luxury to go over and re-do things...

BATES: Well I know I don't have the time but sometimes I ***do*** rewrite stories. It's not financially sound to spend four or five weeks on a story, but at times you find you just can't think of the money, you just don't let that stop you as far as the story is concerned. So you lose a night's sleep or pay a bill a little late. You learn to live with it.

That's one of the odd things about the industry. It's not like you're drawing a regular salary every week. If you need more money you write more. If you don't write, the bills don't get paid. Money always depends on when you turn a story in. You're always constantly fighting between the feelings of "Is this the best story I could do?" or "Do I need the check?" You try and find a medium, but usually the check loses.

Oh, did I tell you about ***FLASH #300***? Well, what we're doing is an anniversary story. The basic premise is that Barry Allen was working in his police lab twenty years ago and chemicals spill over him. Then we switch to this private clinic where Barry Allen has been for twenty years. He's completely paralyzed. In his mind, due to this terrible accident, he's invented this fantasy that the accident gave him super-speed. So all these adventures he's been having as The Flash over the years have all been in his mind. And a psychiatrist is sitting next to him saying, "Look, Mr. Allen, if lightning strikes a bunch of chemicals and they spill all over you they won't give you super-speed. They'd scar you, put you in a coma, and paralyze you for life." Then he pulls out an issue of ***ALL-STAR*** comics and says, "Look, everybody knows The Flash was your hero. Obviously your childhood memories are causing this delusion." Iris visits him with her husband and two kids. Iris waited for him to recover for two or three years and then she got married. It's not an imaginary story or anything like that. That's the situation.

CF: Have you talked to Carmine about ***THE FLASH*** and is he as enthusiastic about taking it over as he once was?

BATES: Oh, yes. He's got a whole bunch of new visual concepts for ***THE FLASH***. He won't tell us what they are, but he's really excited about them.

CF: You don't think he resents working on something that he left behind him fifteen years before?

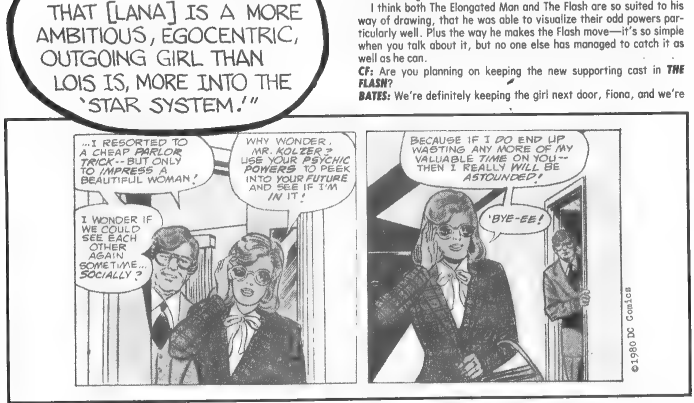
BATES: No, I think he's revived his interest because of the stuff he's done in the interim. I think all the Marvel work and the Warren work got him doing different enough things so he's excited about doing ***THE FLASH*** again.

I think both The Elongated Man and The Flash are so suited to his way of drawing, that he was able to visualize their odd powers particularly well. Plus the way he makes the Flash move—it's so simple when you talk about it, but no one else has managed to catch it as well as he can.

CF: Are you planning on keeping the new supporting cast in ***THE FLASH***?

BATES: We're definitely keeping the girl next door, Fiona, and we're

"...IT'S VERY CLEAR THAT [LANA] IS A MORE AMBITIOUS, EGOCENTRIC, OUTGOING GIRL THAN LOIS IS, MORE INTO THE 'STAR SYSTEM.'"


...I RESORTED TO A CHEAP PARLOR TRICK--BUT ONLY TO IMPRESS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN!
WHY WONDER, MR. KOLZER? USE YOUR PSYCHIC POWERS TO PEEK INTO YOUR FUTURE AND SEE IF I'M IN IT!
I WONDER IF WE COULD SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN SOMETIME... SOCIALLY?
BECAUSE IF I DO END UP WASTING ANY MORE OF MY VALUABLE TIME ON YOU--THEN I REALLY WILL BE ASTOUNCED!
'BYE-EE!
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going to bring back that actress, Daphne Dean. Now that Barry's single we're going to increase his social life.

I think it's going to be interesting bringing in his parents because they've been totally ignored except for one or two stories. I think it's very rare for an adult super-hero to relate to his father. They're either not around or they're dead. I think that's one reason there was such a positive reaction to the **"Jonathan Kent"** story. Even if they are alive, they generally don't know their son or daughter is a super-hero so they can't relate on that level. It's really weird to see a super-hero and his father as equals, yet they're not. I think that's another way to handle characterization: to show how one character acts or treats another character who's close to him. We've really neglected parents, though; we've generally focused on girlfriends.

Apparently ***FLASH*** is doing very well. I think that was another case where the book was getting stale. It has nothing to do with anyone associated with the book; I just think the marriage was a good idea in 1968, but after so many years there was nothing one could do with it. Instead of being a plus and a unique factor, it became a hindrance. It was bogging down the book. One thing I'm very proud about with the ***FLASH*** is that we took so long to do Iris' death and we did it—I won't say with glee—with such depth and giving it such importance. We also did it so there was no warning it was going to happen. In real life, death doesn't happen after a long series of dramatic incidents that build up to it. Usually it just **happens**. I really hate stories that you can tell by page three that the character is going to die on page twelve. Things are building and there is the gloom hanging over everything.

CF: The books that have **"Death of an Important Character"** as a cover blurb?

BATES: Yeah. What we did was an incredibly complicated plot where one of the things that just happened to happen was that Iris croaked. It hit the reader that way, too. Most of them wouldn't believe it was true. They had been so conditioned to believe over the years that deaths were never real in comics or that they just didn't happen this way. They really thought there was going to be a cop-out: it was going to be a parallel universe or something. We purposefully put things into the story so that readers could seize upon them and say, "Well, it's not going to be real because of (this or that)." We took great delight that after planting these things that could be "outs" Iris really was dead; that there really **is** death.

CF: Comics have been accused of not really having characters but at best resorting to stereotypes, but you've mentioned that you've been working to develop the characters of Clark and Flash, and Superman. Do you see them as stereotypes?

BATES: I do, actually. I think you have to make them interesting in spite of that. I think we all look at ourselves and classify ourselves as some type of stereotype. I think the same thing happens with the characters. But there is always something interesting you can do with the characters. They **are** familiar, but you can still find facets that haven't been explored before. When you find something new to say about the characters, it's like finding something out about your best friend that you never knew before. That's the key: making the familiar reveal new twists. That's the key to making these characters interesting.

CF: How would you describe the Superman-Lois Lane relationship? Jules Feiffer has described the friangle as the expression of two "typical American relationships."

BATES: I think that was borne out by the movie. Chris Reeve said in all those interviews that when he played Clark Kent he was basically playing himself. I think that Clark is the link most of us have with Superman. Clark is the klutz within us. Superman is the epitome of what the ideal man should be—a fantasy fulfillment of what we all wish we could be. To have those two extremes in one character, linked through love of the same woman, is such a compelling concept. I don't think Siegel & Shuster knew what they had when they invented it, but I think that that has a lot to do with the character surviving this long. I think for many years we overlooked that aspect of the character's attraction. We got away from it and it's probably the essential essence of the character. Like sometimes we'd do stories that didn't have Clark in them at all. And while that's okay once in a while, if you do too much of that you're going to lose the

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YOU DESERVE IT, SUPERGIRL! AFTER ALL, YOU ARE THE WORLD'S GREATEST HEROINE!
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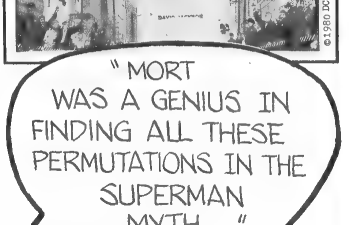
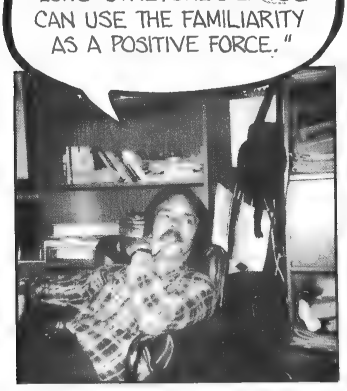


tension between Superman and Clark.

I remember the Clark-Superman distinction started to be concentrated on again as early as 1973 or 1974. We decided we had to pay more attention to it. We brought in Steve Lombard to focus attention on Clark's klutziness...

CF: To what extent do you think the Clark Kent identity is just a pose to disguise Superman? There seems to be a great difference of opinion among writers...

BATES: I think Kent is incredibly real. He's been that identity ever since he was found by the Kents. I think emphasizing the reality of the Clark identity and the necessity for it is easier to do now that we have a ***SUPERBOY*** comic. I've always made it a point in those stories to prove that the Clark identity is really necessary for him to function as Superboy. Clark was a very real person as a teenager; he knew who he was. Clark isn't an alien from Mars, wearing a disguise, and walking the streets: he's a human, raised by humans, and who acts and thinks like a human. Superman really **is** two people: the alien and the human. I think each persona is completely real and valid. I think one of the interesting tensions in the book comes from



which of the two identities is stronger. You can emphasize one over the other depending on the story, but what always comes through, no matter who you emphasize, is the fact that you can't really separate the two. You can't discard one identity completely.

CF: But what about Kent's character traits? Perhaps his timidity is assumed, but what about his introversion?

BATES: I think Kent is introverted. I think if he had to be Superman all the time, he'd be introverted if he was wearing the costume or not. The introversion of Clark Kent is acting as a release, a welcome release, from being Superman. By the same token, Superman gets a lot of the adulation Clark craves but can't get in that identity. The whole thing about Clark becoming a newscaster sort of rocked the boat as far as I was concerned. I think the less Kent is on the air, the better it will be for the reader. It seems to invalidate all this character separation. Also being seen by millions of people every day is not the best thing to do for a living if you are trying to keep a secret identity.

CF: Would you like to get rid of the TV association?

BATES: No. I think the idea of having both the TV studio and the Planet as story springboards is good. It gives him suitable backdrops for different character emphasis and different casts. I know why they put him on TV; it makes sense when you remember that kids, especially young kids, are far likelier to be familiar with TV news than newspaper reporting. Kids don't read newspapers.

CF: Would it have been a better idea to have cast him as a TV reporter or a producer, someone who is not the mainstay of the program?

BATES: Maybe, except what he basically had as both a reporter and an anchorman is the responsibility to get his own stories. It's not real in the sense that most anchormen are spoonfed the material by other reporters, so obviously the newsroom situation isn't realistic.

CF: There's just a certain amount of suspension of disbelief that has to be brought in about that and say other conventions like the glasses...

BATES: You know I think Julie and Marty did a story once explaining the glasses... That's like explaining why Superman has blue hair. I think there are just some things in comics that don't need to be explained. The readers just have to accept them or the whole structure of the comic doesn't work. You can make a whole list of the conventions that glue the story together, I don't think the readers need, or **want**, them explained.

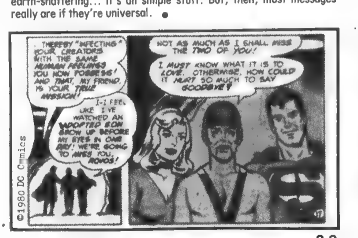
CF: Is there THE SUPERMAN story as far as you're concerned? The story you always have wanted to write, but can't because it would change the legend?

BATES: I don't know. That's a good question. I must admit I'm not too thrilled with Kandor not being around anymore. I really loved that as a gimmick. I think there were a lot of things that had yet to be done with the concept. But if I had total control over the book, I just I could invent something as totally earthshaking as Kandor—something that really could shake up the whole legend. Something as radical as if Superman had a brother—that's been done to death—but something as upsetting as that. Something like what if he had a power that he's always had but can never use. He's not allowed to use it. Something like that.

I really like to do stories like that: making the obvious interesting. Like the **"Light from Krypton" (ACTION #489)**: that was there all the time, but no one had ever thought of using it before. You're picking up on an idea that had virtually been under everyone's nose, but no one else noticed it. You take things that are established but you develop it in a new way, you take a different slant. But you're not inventing something or contriving new things that the reader can tell by the third page this would only happen in a comic. I really hate it when the writer contrives something, puts his characters into situations, strictly to generate action and the plot. Like when a comic opens and on the first page the hero is flying at a villain on a rooftop while saying: "You won't escape me this time! Just wait 'til you see this new story gimmick!" No movie or book starts that way. It's like you're starting in the middle of the story. No motivation, no buildup. I think the first couple of pages are very important for the **story**. You have to establish so much in the way of character identification, motivation highlighting, just lots of things. I resent it when some writer uses those pages just for another fight and doesn't treat it like the start of a **story**, but rather another installment of a running fight.

CF: Obviously you have a working definition of what is a good story? Plot structure seems to have a good deal to do with that. It seems that characterization now is fairly important. Is there anything else that you think is necessary to transform a story from a professional job into a job that you can be proud of?

BATES: I am looking for something that isn't stated in the story but is there for the reader to surmise. In my **"Jonathon Kent"** story there were a lot of emotional ramifications to his seeing his son again as an adult when he thought he would. I always try to write a story that says something about the human condition, love, about man's relationship with others. Maybe not very intricate messages or very earth-shattering... it's all simple stuff. But, then, most messages really are if they're universal. ●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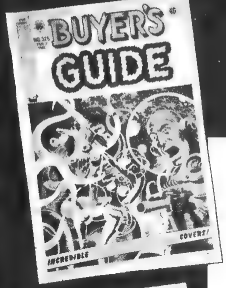

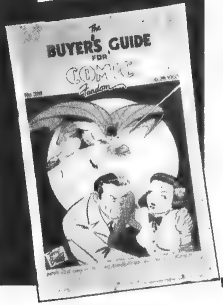

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Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall, #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, N.J. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00-9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P.O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Mt. Prospect, IL. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Prospect High School, Room 130, 801 W. Kensington Rd., every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. Contact: R. Marr.

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Ken Gorman or Mike Berthiaume, P.O. Box 11336 Postal Station H, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2H5Z0.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Ken Strack, N. 22nd St., Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 992-3323.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eddie's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

Rochester, NY. COMIC BOOK PEN PAL CLUB. Newsletter published. For info, contact: The Comic Book Man, 135 Glen Ellyn Way, Rochester, NY 14618.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00-4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Urbana, IL. CHAMPAIGN-URBANA COMIC CLUB. Meets at the Illinois Union Building, Room 215, 712 W. Illinois, Urbana, every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Contact: Mel DeSart.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions. (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X1A8.

COMICS CONVENTIONS

ATLANTA CON, Jan. 10 and 11, at the Ramada Inn, Monroe Drive at I-85, Atlanta, Ga. Guests include Dave and Deni Sim, Bob McLeod, and Pat Broderick. Admission is $5.00 for both days or $3.00 for one day.

CHICAGO MINI-CON, Jan. 18, at the Pick-Congress Hotel at 520 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL. Admission is 75¢.

CREATION CON, Jan. 31 and Feb. 1, at the Philadelphia Sheraton at 1725 Kennedy Blvd., Philadelphia, Pa. Guests include Joe Staton, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman. Activities include Art Displays, Films, Costume Parades, and auctions. Admission is $5.00 for one day or $9.00 for both.

CREATION CON, Jan. 2-4, at the Biltmore Hotel, in downtown LA, CA. Guests include Stan Lee, Gerry Conway, and Frank Brunner. Activities will include art shows, art contests, costume parades, and panels. Admission is $5.00 per day or $13.00 for all three.

FOOL-CON, April 3-5, at Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, KS. Special Guests include Robert Heinlein, Katherine Kurz, Michael Whelan, and many other major SF and Fantasy writers and artists. Special activities include the presentation of The Balrog Awards, art exhibit, film series, costume parade, etc. Admission is $7.50 until March 15 and $9.00 thereafter. For Ticket information write: Student Activities Office, Johnson County Community College, College Blvd., Overland Park, KS 66210 or call (913) 888-8500, ext. 409.

LONG ISLAND COMIC BOOK AND BASEBALL CARD SHOW, Jan. 6., at the Coliseum Motor Inn at 1650 Hempstead, Long Island, NY. Admission is free.

PAPER COLLECTIBLES EXTRAVAGANZA II, Jan. 17 and 18, at the Glendale Civic Auditorium, 1401 N. Verdugo Rd., Glendale, CA. There will be a full range of dealers offering everything from comics to pulps. All paper products will be featured. Admission is $2.25.

RHODE ISLAND SUPER-CON COMIC BOOK SHOW, Dec. 21, at the Pawtucket Howard Johnson's, 2 George St., Pawtucket, RI.

YESTERDAY... AND TODAY'S COMIC BOOK SHOW, Jan. 18, at the Holiday Inn, I-95, New London, CT. Admission is $1.00.

If you belong to a comics club or run a comics convention and would like to be listed in this space, please send all pertinent information to COMICS FEATURE, 31½ Roberts Rd. #2, Cambridge, MA 02138.

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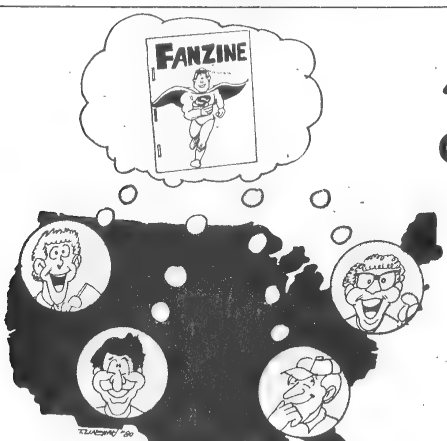

"IT WAS COMICS TIME!"

By Don & Maggie Thompson

[Note: This column is, of necessity, a personal view of the development of comics fandom. Others who lived through the same events will have a different view. We would love to hear from them, so as to show the different effects the same time had on different people. Don't be concerned if we have gone by the time you wish to discuss; we can always introduce new material. Send letters of information, photos of long-ago events, and the like to us: Don and Maggie Thompson, 8786 Hendricks Road, Mentor, Ohio 44060.]

It was the end of a decade. (Remember, decades run from 1 to 10; there was no year 0. The decade of the fifties ran from 1951 to 1960.)

It was Labor Day weekend 1960.

Sit-ins had begun in the South, with blacks campaigning for the right to be served at lunch counters; the first integration of San Antonio, Texas, lunch counters had occurred in March.

The U-2 reconnaisance plane piloted by Gary Powers had been shot down over the U.S.S.R. just before an Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit meeting was going to begin in May. (The summit conference was similarly shot down, when Eisenhower refused to apologize for the flight.)

Also in May, birth control pills were made publicly available for the first time.

Most Americans were unaware that the National Liberation Front (a communist group opposing Ngo Dinh Diem) was forming in South Vietnam.

As the fans assembled for Pittcon (the world science fiction convention in Pittsburgh), Presidential candidates John Kennedy and Richard Nixon were preparing for their first TV debate, to come later that month.

It was the time of a real watershed of experience in the U.S. Life in the 1960s would be radically different from life to that point.

The fifties had been mostly the Eisenhower years—years of brinkmanship, rock and roll, juvenile delinquency, and Cold War. It was ***not*** the high-spirited, carefree time of ***HAPPY DAYS***. It was a time when children in school regularly participated in Civil Defense drills so they'd know what to do in case of nuclear attack—a time of constant, just-below-the-surface fears of A-bomb holocaust. And the decade was coming to an end.

In September 1960, it had been almost six years since the Comics Code had been instituted, four and a half since the failure of EC's last attempt to produce dramatic magazines to avoid the Code. It had been almost seven years since Captain Marvel had agreed to retire from the skies in a bargain between Fawcett and DC which kept the Big Red Cheese grounded.

Fandom Zone

Pittcon was grand fun for the hundreds of science-fiction fans who attended. Worldcons had gradually been growing in size, but con committees had not yet reached the point at which they were trying to discourage people from coming. Attendees included Judith Merril, James Blish, Robert Heinlein, Issac Asimov, Harlan Ellison, and Randy Garrett.

And Dick and Pat Lupoff.

Few people knew Dick and Pat. They had been reading SF for years and were involved with other New York City fans. But they hadn't done a lot of fan writing and were not widely known.

It was at Pittcon that they did two things: They attended the costume ball dressed as Captain and Mary Marvel. And they distributed their new fanzine, ***XERO***. Many people commented with pleasure on their excellent costumes; not so many were eager to take the 38-page ***XERO***.

It seemed on the surface to be just one of countless fanzines that came and went in that era. It was mimeographed and contained the usual gamut of fannish articles, including one by Harlan Ellison on ***PSYCHO***. But the one that is most recommended—and is of central importance to this article—was titled "The Big Red Cheese" and was written by Dick. It was an affectionate look at Captain Marvel and it was announced as the first of a series. The series was to be called ***And All in Color for a Dime.***

In their editorial, the Lupoffs gave their prospectus:

> "***And All in Color for a Dime***" can use as many more segments as people care to contribute. The first-installment, back on page 17, was to have had another section on the symbolism present in Captain Marvel. All right, stop sneering and go on to the next item if that's how you feel. Seriously, stop and think a minute: the innocent boy following that dark figure into an ***abandoned subway***... the ceremony changing the frightened but virtuous boy into a strong and courageous man by supernatural means... the brilliant white-coated scientist scheming to become ruler of the universe, blocked but never destroyed by the mighty figure... Who was the ***real*** hero, who the ***real*** villain of the Captain Marvel stories?
>
> "This and other matters will be discussed in an article in the ***AICFAD*** series, dealing with comic book villains. Walter Breen has announced his intention to write it, and it should be ready one of these months.
>
> "Lee Ann Tremper has agreed to try her hand at an installment about her girlhood heroine, Wonder Woman. And a little thought about ***that*** series reveals more than a simple adventure story, too.
>
> "Who else wants to try his hand? Feel like rushing to the defense of Superman, anyone? How about the old aviation strips: Captain Midnight, Barney Baxter, oh hell, there must have been at least a dozen—if not a hundred. And super characters and semi-super characters by the carload. Anybody want to do an article on the common characteristics of supermen?"

None of the suggested future topics ran in the pages of ***XERO***, as it happened. (However, Juanita Coulson eventually was assigned the Wonder Woman article, and Lupoff himself tackled the aviation strips. Those articles appeared, not in ***XERO*** but in ***THE COMIC-BOOK BOOK***, edited by Don Thompson and Dick Lupoff, from Arlington House in 1973.) But the twelve pages devoted to Captain Marvel brought a response from an audience that hadn't known of its own existence.

So ***XERO*** was the inspiration for comics fandom?

Not quite.

Because something else happened Pittcon. It was not begun by ***XERO***, because we didn't see ***XERO #1*** until after the convention. It was at the Worldcon banquet that we had a long conversation with another SF fan. His name was Hal Lynch, and we spent a pleasant meal discussing how much we all enjoyed certain comic books and strips—and about how little informa-

tion there was about them.

This was an age in which few comics artists' or writers' names were public knowledge. (We wrote last month about the lack of information in the field at that point.) We all agreed that there were many fans who followed favorite strips and would enjoy a fanzine devoted to comic art. Don Thompson and Maggie Curtis decided to start such a fanzine.

That fall Maggie began her first year at Oberlin College, and Don started working at the Cleveland ***Press***, visiting her on weekends in Oberlin. There, using the college's mimeograph machine, they produced a flyer, ***HARBINGER #1***, that fall.

"***HARBINGER*** is more than just a one-shot, it is a sighting shot, published in hopes of reaching as many potential supporters of and contributors to ***COMIC ART*** as possible.

"***COMIC ART*** is a projected fanzine devoted to, as the title suggests, comic art. Not only comic strips and comic books, but cartoons (political, gag or sports); Big/Better Little Books; hardcover or paperbound collections whether of strips or cartoons; animated movie and TV cartoons, etc.

"Content will be of several types, designed to appeal to the casual peruser, the avid fan, the collector, or the reminiscer who grows nostalgic at mention of bygone books, strips, episodes or characters."

We had heard of ***XERO*** by the time ***HARBINGER*** appeared, for we recommended it to our mailing list. And we dedicated ***HARBINGER #1*** (and, therefore, the concept of doing a comics-only fanzine) to the people who had given us the most support: "Dedicated to: Dick & Pat Lupoff, Hal Lynch, Bill Thailing & Larry Ivie, for services rendered."

So ***HARBINGER*** was the inspiration for comics fandom?

Not quite.

Because, totally unknown to us, two ***other*** fans—not science-fiction fans at all—were talking about starting an amateur magazine devoted to comic-book super-heroes. They were Jerry Bails and Roy Thomas, and they didn't know about the Lupoffs and they didn't know about us. They just wanted to start a magazine about their interest in comics.

Roy Thomas is written about from time to time; Jerry Bails is less well known these days. When we asked for some personal information in 1976, he said he was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 26, 1933. "In 1934 they stuck a 10¢ sticker on me and put me up for sale. Wore a Superman sweatshirt at 7, dyed it blue, along with a sugar sack. Stole my sis' blue petticoat and with a pair of scissors made myself a Batman costume for Halloween." He sent samples of his art to EC ("and Al Feldstein was nice enough to respond with advice.") He once won two tickets to the Orpheum Theatre for an entry in the Kansas City ***Journal***'s weekly cartoon contest, but the ***Journal*** went bankrupt three days later and Jerry never got the tickets.

No doubt realizing the uncertainty of a future in cartooning, Jerry opted for a B.S. in physics, an M.S. in math, and a Ph.D. in natural science. But, even as he became a teacher, he obviously never lost his love for comics. And with Roy Thomas (another man who loved comics while getting into teaching as a profession) he began to prepare the first issue of ***ALTER EGO*** (or ***ALTER-EGO***; the hyphen came and went throughout the magazine's existence).

So ***ALTER EGO*** was the inspiration for comics fandom?

Not quite.

In those days, Julius Schwartz's comics at DC were running addresses of some fans in the lettercolumns. Where addresses are available, contact is possible.

Was DC's running the inspiration for comics fandom?

No. None of these was the ***sole*** source for comics fandom, because comics fandom grew from them all.

Comics fandom ***could*** have started from any one of these sources. It ***could*** have started ***without*** any specific one of these sources. ***XERO #1***, ***COMIC ART #1***, ***ALTER EGO #1***, DC's Silver Age comics—all combined to produce what comics fandom became. They started independently. ***COMIC ART*** was not born because of ***XERO***. ***ALTER EGO*** formed without ***HARBINGER***.

Because it was, quite simply, comics time.

There were, all at once, a large number of people who had grown up with comics, who had learned to read from four-color pages, who had had comics as a vital and beloved part of their childhoods.

These comics-loving kids had come to an articulate age and wanted to talk about their love.

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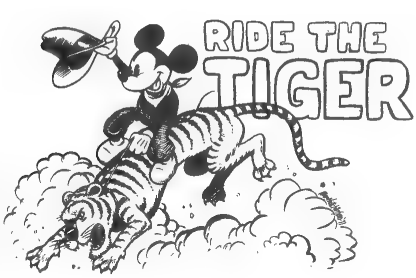
Next month: "What Next?" •



Mickey Mouse © Walt Disney Productions

by Bob Jennings

Welcome to another installment of Ride the Tiger. This is a fanzine review column, for those who don't know. Fanzines will be rated on your basic grammar school level, from F, the worst, up to A, the best. Plus and minus marks may be added for your further confusion.

Please keep in mind some of my particular prejudices as you read further on, and make necessary corrections if your prejudices and mine do not coincide. I do not particularly like interviews, pinups or folio art pages, amateur comic strips or poorly researched articles.

Fanzine editors/publishers who would like to have their material reviewed here should send copies to:

Bob Jennings
RFD 2, Whiting Rd.
Dudley, Mass. 01570

Now, on with the show.

BEM #30, $2.25. Martin Lock, 3 Marlow Court, Britannia Square, Worcester, WR1 3Dp, England; 8½ x 12½", 40 pages, photo offset, bi-monthly.

BEM is one of the best fanzines around, and it is certainly the best British fanzine I've ever encountered. It carries plenty of up-to-date news on the current comic scene, along with a good balance of interviews, factual articles, opinions and letters.

However this issue struck me as being a little below ***BEM***'s usual high standards. The news is snappy and delivered with the usual assortment of interpretive insights which provides ***BEM***'s news department with a certain depth missing in other newszines. However from the entire department, slightly more than a single column of print was devoted to the British comics scene. Everything else revolved around American comics. Considering that this is a British fanzine, and considering the variety and frequency of most British comic titles I found this a bit odd, even absurd.

The news is followed immediately with an article by Les Chester on DC's science fiction comics. This could have developed into an interesting examination on the changing trends in the comic book marketplace, and DC's attempts to capitalize on or deal with them, but it isn't. What we have is basically a sketchy overview of all the DC science fiction titles, along with a couple of explanatory paragraphs about each one. Now, bludgeoning the obvious has never been a big thrill for me, and I suspect most of the people who regularly read fanzines are going to have pretty much the same opinion. For a rank neofan who knows virtually nothing about comic book history this might be great stuff; otherwise you're going to find it dull as hell.

One of the most interesting features this time round is an interview done with Paul Levitz. It is dated material (from mid-1979), but the interview still holds all sorts of unique surprises. I'm sure everybody knows Paul Levitz. Well, here he is, wheeling and dealing and defending his story policies with blanket statements and very little supporting logic. In the Levitz World writers write, artists draw, and editors sit around shuffling papers. Their job as editors is to scramble around and latch onto the good writers and the good artists, otherwise the editor is doomed to producing poor books. Very little comment or defense is offered for Levitz's own controversial writing efforts. So far as his killing off the Earth-two Batman, he mentions that "we sold a lot of comics" with that one. Right on. Batwoman and other characters were wiped out in order to prevent them from being reintroduced into new stories. Why that would have been such a horrible crime is not explained.

So far as the business end of comics goes, Levitz is more explicit and also much more interesting. DC is making a bundle of dollars from their comics these days, and Levitz explains why DC has no interest in venturing into the black and white magazine field, and also the difference in economic viewpoints between DC and Marvel. DC wants to develop long-term winners that will produce substantial profit percentages over an extended number of years, while Marvel is looking at short-term goals and is therefore willing to introduce and cut back books quickly in order to maximize impact sales on an eight month or one year turnover. I found all this fascinating, and if you have an interest in comics either as a creative artform or from a business standpoint you should check this out. Good reading here.

There are a couple of short comic

strips this round. The first revolves around a spaceship named ***H.M.S. Conqueror***. The story was okay, except that it telegraphs its ending on the second page. Further over there is another mini-strip which is filled with clever similes and bad puns, which I found to be a lot of fun, though not terribly well drawn.

BEM also carries a fanzine review column full of two-sentence commentaries. The reviewer seems to be deliberately walking a tightrope in order to avoid making any value judgments about any of the zines he mentions.

The section devoted to reviews of current comics I found somewhat exasperating. It's not just that the reviewers bask in the glow of personal prejudices without bothering to explain themselves or defend their extraordinary opinions. I also seriously question the validity of a bi-monthly fanzine carrying current-comic reviews in the first place. By the time the fanzine appears the comic issues are long gone, and single-issue reviews cannot serve as a constructive evaluation of either the title or the book's creative team.

There is other stuff here, lots of it. ***BEM*** is a good-sized fanzine filled to the brim with small type. A glance at the literal meanings of various comic book character names was entertaining. Sometimes the names are applicable. Kal-El, for example, means "Star Child" which certainly fits. On the other hand Conan means "intelligent," so there are plenty of character names that don't fit.

One of the more incredible items in the issue is the interview by ***BEM*** staffer Adam Pirani of the editors and production directors at UK Marvel. This is worth the price of the fanzine alone. The UK Marvel people react, rather violently, to the criticism they have received in the fan press and attempt to justify themselves. They do not succeed.

What they do is to make absolute fools of themselves, contradicting themselves constantly, delivering such deathless lines as "I think [that our new products] will astound our normal readership because it astounds me and I'm pretty normal," and "I can't understand why everybody dislikes me. I'm a nice person: Nick Landau used to like me, didn't he?" How about this one, "To be honest, the fan press should ignore us and we should ignore the fan press. But we can't. Because from what you've shown me, we're sniped at continually. We're not ignored." Circular logic seems to be the strongest suit at the UK Marvel offices. This one is ***not*** to be missed.

Anything after this interview would be anti-climatic, but I should mention that there is also a letters section, a nice long, friendly, chatty letters section that is without doubt the ***best*** letter column in fandom. Want to see how a well-organized, well-developed letters section should be, one that is fun for the readers to read and even more fun to participate in? Then check this out, in fact, pick up the whole issue. You'll find plenty of good material in this issue, and in all their other issues to excite and entertain you.

RATING: B+

FANTASY TRADER #47, no US price listed, try $1.00, Gez Kelly, 34 Heworth Hall Dr., York YO3 0AQ, England, bi-monthly, 5" x 8", photo offset, 24 pages.

This is the first flat-out British adzine I've had a chance to look at up close. The first thing that strikes me is that there aren't very many ads here at all. The idea of a ***bi-monthly*** adzine also seems to be rather odd, considering the thick weekly issues of ***BUYER'S GUIDE*** American fans are used to.

I presume the thin and widely-spaced issues are primarily the result of the compact nature of the British Isles. With a convention or a fan gathering happening virtually every week of the year, much the same as with US comic fandom, it is very easy for the British fan to jump on board a train, zip down to the convention and view the merchandise firsthand at relatively little expense. One need not worry about expensive overnights or other assorted money-eating expenses common to most American conventions. The British conventions generally seem to be semi-informal open affairs with low table rates and few entrance fees.

That's good for fans & collectors but it does make it sort of tough to produce a comics fanzine.

FANTASY TRADER tries to fill in the gaps by presenting articles and news on the comics field. The problem is that the articles are very short and tend to be too general. There is a pretty interesting analysis of Eisner's ***"Life on Another Planet"*** series, followed by a little squibble called ***"Answer Man"*** which offers a free subscription to anyone who can stump him with a comic related question, a general chat section, a few letters, a bit about the radio show ***"Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy"*** and that's all. Most of the articles are a page or less

in length. The rest of the issue is filled with assorted advertisements, mostly for conventions or comic shops.

There isn't much to grab onto here. The purpose of an advertising fanzine is to carry ads, of course, but I had hoped that the supplementary material would have a lot more depth and focus to it than the stuff offered here. Under the circumstances I wouldn't advise any American fans to try this out unless they have a specific need for British material, but for a British area fan this might be worth looking into.

NO RATING

FANDOM CALENDAR 1981, $2.95, Ward Batty, 944 Austin Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30307, 8½ x 11", color covers, insides b&w, offset on slick paper.

How do you review a calendar? What can really be said about such an item? Basically calendars are functionally neutral items, designed to provide an array of dates, phases of the moon, and perhaps highlighting a few significant holidays or other important anniversaries so that their owners won't jump out of bed prepared for a full day's work when they could have been laying around catching up on lost sleep.

In past years wall calendars were almost exclusively a product of the advertising industry. You picked one up from your local Rexall druggist, or your friendly neighborhood liquor outlet, or perhaps if you were a regular there, your favorite auto body shop might favor you with a copy. These wall calendars usually came equipped with one large full color illo of a suitably scantily clad young lady with that inevitable "come-hither" look in her eyes, and you tacked it up on the bulletin board in your den and then forgot about it.

But all that was in days past. Within the last few years something called the Calendar Explosion has occurred. Calendars now come in an astonishing variety of styles and types. There are extensive sections of department or stationery stores devoted exclusively to calendars, and there are wall calendars for every occasion and every possible interest, from family pets to frisky sea monsters.

So of course, why not a wall calendar devoted to comics fandom? Not that the idea is a particularly new one. The first fandom calendar effort I remember seeing was something produced by Biljo White back in 1964 and was mimeographed on yellow two-tone paper. It featured a number of fan artists rendering their versions of favorite Golden Age comic heroes. But that was a long, long time ago.

The current fandom calendar does not concern itself with renditions of traditional comic heroes, or even contemporary comic characters of any sort. What we have here is basically a calendar whose only unifying theme appears to be that the illos were all produced by people who are basically fans, and in several cases even this premise is questionable. The artistic subject matter offered here is incredibly diverse, ranging all the way from straight science fiction adventure art, thru sword and sorcery, underground cartooning and traditional funny animal material.

The quality of the art is as variable as the subject matter. The straight science fiction and adventure art seems to be the best. Stylists such as Blyberg and Geir have a very firm grasp on their illustrating abilities, and they know how to turn in tight, professional efforts. Some of the other material is also very enjoyable. Gary Kwapisz's realistic funny animal art is a joy to behold, and so is Dick Hanley's panorama of comic book stereotypes.

Some of the other work is of questionable value in a collection of this type. The Bruning vegetable parodies are a typical example of a one-line gag that was worth a chuckle the first time it was used. More than a year later the gag has lost any charm or originality. The Brenda Mings cartoon was simplistic and clean-cut, but I kept wondering why anyone would want to waste a page here on a drawing that eighty or ninety percent of the artists in fandom could turn out just as well, and with no special effort. The purpose of the calendar is to spotlight the most talented and versatile of fandom's artists, and this hardly meets the criteria.

There are other problems as well. The pieces by Bret Blevins and Timothy Fuller were competent enough, but left me with a "so what" feeling. It's hard to believe the calendar really needed this particular piece of artwork with so much other material and so many other eager artists available.

On line, the assortment of illos seems to mix well enough. There is

enough good art to outweigh the indifferent efforts, but only just barely. There are such incredible differences in styles and subject content that it is difficult to form a solid feeling for the calendar art as a whole. Casual viewers are going to find much to enjoy and plenty to despise throughout the assortment.

So far as the rest of the calendar goes, I accept on face value that all the layouts of weeks and days are in proper order. The calendar is also loaded with a great deal of information which may or may not be of interest to you. Birthdates of movie stars and historic figures prominent in American history predominate, along with such deathless bits of wisdom as the day the Stamp Act became law and the date when Johnny Appleseed died.

Unfortunately there is precious little information dealing with comics and even less with fandom. What events do get highlighted seem to be poorly researched and are pretty arbitrary in their dating. A fandom calendar should ideally present information and background about and of special interest to ***fans***, including conventions, fan history, information background and details about the hobby itself. There just isn't much of that present here.

So how do you review a calendar? In parts, apparently. The artwork here is varied and most of it is pretty good, running from the really excellent to the merely mediocre. There are no real dud illos here. So far as pertinent and interesting information goes, I thought the calendar lacked a lot in this area. If you are looking for super-slick graphics, lots of color art, a unified theme, and loads of witty material or information of an extraordinary nature, then you'd better go somewhere else. On the other hand the effort is fast, friendly, and competent, and when you buy a fandom calendar your money goes to support the creative efforts of fan artists and fan publishers working within the hobby to better their craft. You could do a hell of a lot worse than that.

NO RATING

IT'S A FANZINE #3, 50¢, Gene Kehoe, 3405 Woodland Ave. #90D, West Des Moines, Idaho 50265. 7 x 8'', 12 pages, photo offset, monthly.

This is a fanzine produced by the Des Moines Comic Club, seeking to expand its sphere of influence outside the regional area. It is small in size, long on enthusiasm. I'm not quite sure how to take the odd size or the single staple holding it together, but this particular issue boasts a wraparound cover with pretty good art, and a general good level of illustration on the inside as well. So far as written material goes the club members provide short articles and columns which attempt to cover slices of recent comic history.

The main problem with this publication is that virtually none of the writers for this issue seem to know much about the subjects they are covering. There is no evidence that even a single one of them attempted to do any sort of research on their respective subjects before sitting down and hammering out each review or commentary. This total lack of even basic research has produced a sloppy, uneven issue filled with more irritating, prejudicial and totally incorrect statements than I've seen in any other fan publication this year.

Caustic backhanded slaps and venemous displays of prejudice are vented casually, as when one writer's comment that he hopes Robert Kanigher is on the unemployment line now, simply because the fan-writer didn't happen to like a ***"Viking Commando"*** story from ***ALL-OUT WAR #6***. Some of the failure to record facts or historic distortions are especially exasperating because accurate information is easily available. Some of these are so obvious you wonder if these fans have been living under rocks all their lives, as with the case of Greg Robertson, who concludes his half-page "history" of comic fandom by remarking that of all the "pioneer" fanzines which appeared from 1960 to 1962 only ***COMIC READER*** and ***RBCC*** are still being published. I personally know of at least four which are still going strong, and I myself happen to still be the editor/publisher of one of them.

As I say, there is a lot of enthusiasm in this little magazine, but the editor and the other members of this club are going to have to realize that producing a fanzine automatically entails developing a sense of journalistic responsibility. Often-slanderous comments, unfounded declarations, and sketchy writeups that do not even outline the subjects they are supposed to be covering do ***not*** make it these days.

RATING 1

THE MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE SERIES REVIEW #2, 75¢ or 4 for $2.00. 837 East 8th St., Tucson, Arizona,85719, 5½ x 8½", 32 pages, typeset, photo offset, quarterly.

This is a fanzine devoted to collectors of juvenile series and adventure books, the old series such as Tom Swift and Nancy Drew. There are only a handful of publications centered around this particular field, and ***MYSTERY & ADVENTURE SERIES REVIEW*** is certainly one of the best. Issue **#2** carries on and even improves on the high standards of competence established with the initial issue.

The editor leads off with a long commentary in which he defends and discusses the position of juvenile series books in the overall world of Literature—that's Literature with a capital "L." His observation, that Literature is in the eye of the beholder and that no one need be ashamed because he reads and enjoys the old juvenile series characters, may seem pretty stale or redundant to comic book collectors, who have already thrashed this sort of thing out many years ago. However the field of juvenile book collecting is still a relatively small and a relatively new phenomenon, with many collectors apparently feeling the social stigma associated with their hobby rather acutely.

The editor makes a rather interesting distinction between juvenile books and their contemporaries on the adult level. He contends that in most cases juvenile series heroes are primarily concerned about their regular business, the same sort of daily affairs that most teenagers might encounter. Juvenile heroes and heroines fall into adventures and as a general rule they become involved primarily in efforts to disengage themselves from the situation, or in order to untangle their friends and families from its consequences. Adult adventure books, on the other hand, are populated by characters who seek out adventure or danger deliberately, and they get paid for their involvement, as is the case with detectives or professional troubleshooters. If they are not paid directly they often engage in adventure purely in the hope of a specific payoff of some kind, whether in the tangible realm of hard cash, or to extricate themselves from personally dangerous situations. This is certainly an interesting observation, and while it doesn't hold true in all cases for either juvenile series books or for adult adventures, the point is well-taken and worth some additional consideration.

The bulk of this issue is devoted to an examination of the ***KEN HOLT*** adventure series published by Grosset and Dunlap during the late forties and early fifties. The writer does a complete and exhaustive study of the books, concentrating on the characters of the protagonists, including a look at the background motivations and the way specific story situations were developed. Even if you've never encountered a single ***KEN HOLT*** book in your life you'll be caught up in the enthusiastic and highly entertaining coverage that is provided here. The article even has comments and afterthoughts by the author of the original ***KEN HOLT*** books. This is an excellent job in every respect.

Kent Winslow has an interesting and somewhat controversial article on the pricing and preservation of juvenile books. He makes a number of good common-sense suggestions, and attempts to come to grips with the pricing on old books. Unfortunately the formula he arrived at, based on cents multiplied times the age of the book and factoring in the book's condition, is both clumsy and unworkable.

This same pricing method has been offered many times in the comic book and pulp magazine collecting field, and has never caught on for the same reason it will never catch on in the juvenile collecting field either. The formula makes no allowance for the elemental laws of supply and demand. Some old books are going to bring higher prices simply because more people are looking for them and are willing to pay premium prices in order to complete their collections. Still, other books from the same time period are going to bring relatively small prices because nobody wants the things. The actual rarity of the book itself has very little to do with the demand level placed on it by collectors, and these facts will automatically invalidate any artificially-arrived-at pricing formula.

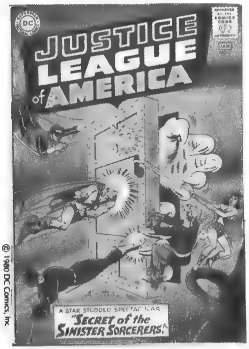
I also have serious qualms about Winslow's grading classifications. After noting that most juvenile books turn up in heavily-read and somewhat battered condition, he then proceeds to outline a series of grading conditions that are impossibly high, including the rather interesting comment that a book and its dust jacket should be graded in equal condition. This means if you had a juvenile series book which was in excellent condition, but it had a dust jacket which had been ripped, creased and sun faded, then the entire volume would have to be listed in fair, or at best, good condition. This is ridiculous, especially when you consider how many series book collectors simply rip off the djs and toss them out anyway. Were Winslows' condition grading to be accepted throughout the hobby, at least 95% of the juvenile books in circulation among collectors would have to be listed as poor to fair. Since the aim is to read and enjoy books, not preserve them in time capsules in bookstore mint condition I rather doubt his comments will ever be taken very seriously.

The issue finishes up with a fairly long letter column, a few ads, and some news on the great Stratemyer-Grosset and Dunlap lawsuit.

Not bad, in all. Individual quibbles I have are washed away in the consideration of the fanzine as a whole. If you have any interest at all in juvenile series books then I suggest you give this a try. It's a bargain at the price, and the information provided is well-researched and certainly well presented.

RATING: A •

20 Years Ago this Month



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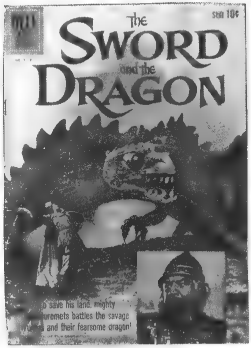

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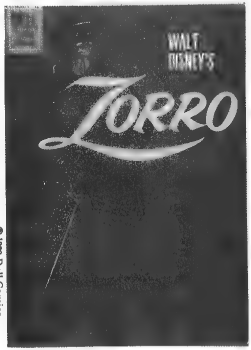

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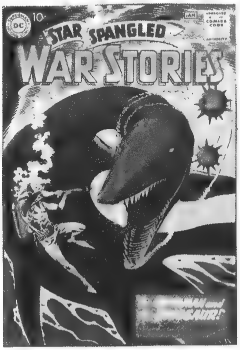

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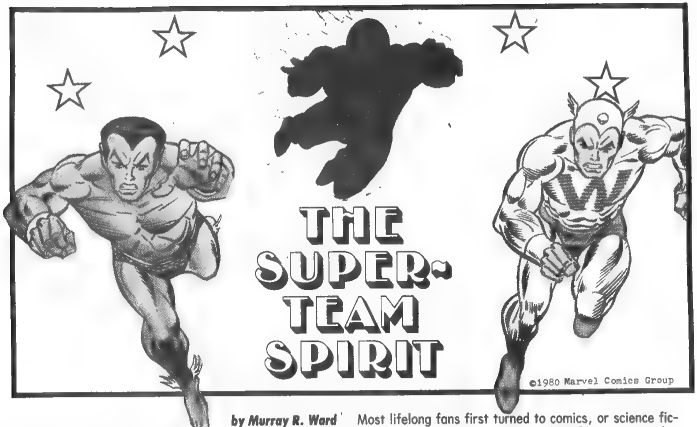


by Murray R. Ward

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES:

Over the next few issues of ***COMICS FEATURE***, this column will be devoted to a series dealing with the operational dynamics of the super-hero team in comics. Since the 1950s are pretty much a null decade as far as the super-hero in comics is concerned, future installments will deal largely with the super-teams of the '60s at Marvel, DC, and other companies, and those of the '70s and '80s. This issue we begin to look at the teams of the Golden Age of the '40s.

Before beginning, however, your columnist would like to take a moment to look at the concept of the super-team from a strictly personal viewpoint.

While the basic idea of the super-hero has always been an appealing one, and the additional archetype of the dashing "lone-wolf" crusader who owes allegiance to no agency but himself and his own principles adds a certain swashbuckling extra flavor, somehow the solo heroes have never seemed as entirely unreal to me as the heroic teams. Presumably, an individual with the powers of a Superman ***could*** keep his identity secret from the world while undertaking a one-man crusade for justice. Perhaps a man with the resources of a Bruce Wayne could secretly perform feats of derring-do in a second, unknown identity as The Batman. And perhaps even such a ne'er-do-well in terms of world-beating power and social standing as Peter Parker, given a genuis intellect and the abilities of Spider-Man, could maintain a double role as an altruistic, if misunderstood, champion.

The hero ***teams***, though, were another matter. The concept of the noble individual is an important one to most comics fans, I think, because of their own origins. Most lifelong fans first turned to comics, or science fiction, or fantasy as an escape medium from an everyday world in which they themselves were the farthest thing from super-heroes, whether they were instead fat, or skinny, or bespectacled, or unattractive, or uncoordinated, and above all, put upon by either superiors or peer groups. As such, the individual hero is a figure of great power and very fulfilling personal fantasy for fans. Teams are another thing altogether. A team is essentially a club, and what fannish outcast ever belonged to a club as a kid, unless he were lucky enough to find other fans to form an organization of his own? Therefore, when the super-hero flies, or attains super-speed, or exhibits fantastic strength, he is only doing what the reader would do if only he had the extensive training, or came from another planet, or owned a Power Ring, or knew a magic word like "Shazam!" When he joins a club of other heroes like himself, he is attaining what is unattainable for the reader, which is even more fantastic to behold.

All of the super-hero teams, especially the earliest examples, are like slightly (only slightly) more adult versions of "kid gangs." The dialogue of the early ***"Justice Society"*** stories is only a half step above that of Simon-and-Kirby's ***"Newsboy Legion."*** The Marvel Family sounds as much like kids in their super-powered identities as in their childish secret identities. When a group of super-heroes meet around a table (usually a King Arthur-style round table, of course) to talk shop, the veneer of seriousness is apt to be rather thin. The atmosphere is more of a Junior Chamber of Commerce playing at Roberts Rules of Order than of an important high-level government or business conference. (This has an obvious real-life parallel in the manner in which science fiction and

comics conventions differ drastically from all other conventions.) The super-heroes are like overgrown Boy Scouts, or very young members of a secret lodge. One almost expects them to hang a sign on their clubhouse reading "No Girls Allowed," as Tubby and his chums do in the ***"Little Lulu"*** strip. Indeed, the JSA are in business for quite a while before Wonder Woman is promoted to "full fighting member" status from her post of Secretary, and even longer before Black Canary is allowed to join.

Speaking personally, the greatest fantasy element inherent in the super-team comics for me is that the teams function to begin with. As a fairly typical fan in my extreme youth, I did not belong to any organization or teams, nor was I asked to join. Not entirely because of a "sour grapes" attitude, but through a long study from the outside of such groups as omitted me from consideration, I discovered that I did not ***want*** to belong to any of them. Just as seeing the super-heroes beat up the bad guys was catharsis for my own drubbings at the hands of bullies, drubbings I would not return if I had the means, because I am a pacifist, so reading the joint exploits of the super-hero team gave me the chance to see in action a principle in which I have little or no working faith: teamwork.

A basic accepted truth of our society is that groups work, that they can accomplish more and greater things than individuals, that the group entity is greater than the sum of its member parts. This "truth" I deny uncategorically. In connection with any activity in which I am personally interested or involved, I have never seen a group carry out a function pertinent to that activity with better results than could have been achieved by individuals, and the more permanent and rule-bound the group, the less they accomplish. Granted, in the world of fandom, many of my peers manage to interact each year to produce the various conventions which I attend. This is hardly a permanent alliance, however, and does not always accomplish its tasks without friction and hurt feelings on the part of some of the participants.

The ideal of the group entity, in North America at least, is tied up with the idea of democracy. As given by Robert A. Heinlein in ***"The Notebooks of Lazarus Long"*** (excerpted from ***TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE***), this is an institution "based on the assumption that a million men are wiser than one man. How's that again?" In other words, "a committee is a life form with six or more legs and no brain." Examples of this syndrome are countless in both government and corporate enterprise, yet when superheroes get together in groups, the much-lauded and overrated group ethic functions, to the betterment of all. Experiencing the exercise of violence second-hand provides the therapy that keeps ***this*** pacifist from flying off the handle in polite company; the super-heroes' vicarious teamwork almost makes up for the disasters just such procedural imperatives cause in real life. The working super-group is to me high fantasy, not because its members are super-powered crusaders in outlandish costumes, but because by working in concert they are amazingly able to accomplish more than by operating solo.

Consider: even more so than average men and women, even more so than fans, super-heroes are individualists. Each is a minority of one among the ordinary people of his world, and with very few exceptions, each is totally different from his fellow heroes. Yet, under the aegis of the Justice League of America, Superman, the most powerful hero in the universe, can find companionship with The Batman, who possesses no extra-human abilities at all. Because they are both Avengers, Hawkeye, a merely human archer, can fight in tandem with Thor, a reincarnated Norse deity. And in the Justice Society, while one charter member is the Atom, an undersized college student with great physical prowess, another is the Spectre, a ghost whose talents are second only to those of the Almighty himself; yet the two are as compatible as old fraternity buddies.

This, even more than the sheer wonderment of seeing more heroes for your money in one story typified by the blurb for early issues of Justice League which read "Just Imagine! Your Favorite Heroes [here followed a list of

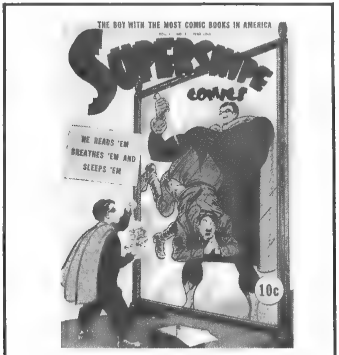
some seven characters) have teamed together as the Justice League of America", is, I believe, the reason why super-team comics are among my very favorites.

Before moving on to this issue's discussion, we should note that those teams under consideration over the next few issues fall into three basic classifications. First, there is the "formulated" super-team: that is, a team in

whose origin episode, several previously-existing and wholly independent heroes, some or all of whom may boast their own strip or title, are gathered together to fight a single menace and decide to form a permanent alliance thereafter. Examples of this type are the Justice League and the Avengers. Second, there is the "common-origin" team: that is, a team whose members share a common origin, receiving their powers, if any, at the same time from a common source, and deciding to remain together as a team from that time on. In the case of those teams who do not possess actual super-powers, but merely individual skills, they may share a common origin by being united in a common cause or by being involved in an incident together which causes them to form a group. Examples of this are the Fantastic Four, the Challengers of the Unknown, and the Blackhawks. Whereas formulated teams retain their individual costumes before and after formation of the team, common-origin teams establish a single common (often para-military) uniform for members of the group, which all members wear, with only slight variations. The third type of team is one which amalgamates the traits of the first two types in a sort of "hybrid" team. An example of this type is the X-Men, whose members owe their powers to a common source, mutation, but not to a common incident of such. They also begin by wearing the kind of uniforms typical of the common-origin teams, but later switch to the more individualistic garb of the formulated team heroes.

Just what super-teams existed during the 1940s? The answer is, precious few.

To limit the scope and length of this article series, which could easily run over the next year's worth of issues, we shall omit the kid gang groups and non-super-powered teams from consideration. This means that due to their lack of super-powers, we shall eliminate mention of the Blackhawks, that seven-man squadron of fliers who fought battles in World War II and thereafter in the pages of ***MILITARY COMICS***, ***MODERN COMICS***, and their own title, and whose present literary descendants include both the Challengers of the Unknown and Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos (all of the above qualify as common-origin teams, of course.) We shall also not deal with the Young Allies, reorganized as the Kid Commandos in the '70s ***INVADERS*** comic, although two of their members were Bucky and Toro, boy sidekicks to Captain America and the Human Torch, respectively. Nor shall we go into detail over the Newsboy Legion, whose strip featured the costumed hero, the Guardian, in ***STAR-SPANGLED COMICS***, or the Little Wise Guys, who eventually ousted their mentor, the original Daredevil, from his own title.



"The individual hero is a figure of great power and very fulfilling personal fantasy for fans."

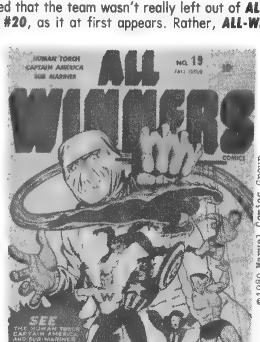
Under our operative definition of super-teams, the first such grouping in the Golden Age were the Marvel heroes known as the Three Xs. One of the only mentions of this team in the various histories of comics comes in

George Olshevsky's Marvel Comics Index Vol. 3, devoted to the Avengers, where he explains that "known individually only by their code names of 1X, 2X, and 3X, this team of specialists made only one appearance, in ***MYSTIC COMICS*** (1st series) **#1**, March 1940." The only other Marvel team of the '40s to appear in the '40s (unlike the Invaders, Liberty Legion, Kid Commandos, etc., who first

appeared in the '70s, although their adventures took place in the war years), was the All-Winners Squad. This team consisted of the remnants of the since-disbanded Invaders and Liberty Legion: Sub-Mariner, the Torch and Toro, Captain America and Bucky (though, as ***WHAT IF #4*** reveals, not the original Cap and Bucky, who had been respectively frozen solid and killed in 1945), the Whizzer, and Miss America. The All-Winners Squad did the Three Xs one better by appearing in a total of two stories, in ***ALL-WINNERS #19*** and **21**, and three adventures in total, the missing story being revealed years later in the aforementioned issue of ***WHAT IF?*** Neither of these teams, obviously, lasted long enough to either require or invite discussion of any length of their operations.

The only one of the many and various comics companies of the Golden Age besides Marvel (then Timely) and DC to feature any super-teams at all was Fawcett. (Bear in mind that the Quality Comics heroes did not band together as the Freedom Fighters until their '70s revival by DC). Their Crime Crusaders Club consisted of the major characters featured in the pages of Master Comics, namely Capt. Marvel Jr., Bulletman, Bulletgirl, and Minute Man, and like the Timely teams, was extremely short-lived, gathering in only one story, in ***MASTER #41***. Of course, Fawcett also published ***THE MARVEL FAMILY***, in which their most popular character, Captain Marvel, fought alongside his two proteges, Capt. Marvel Jr. and Mary Marvel, sometimes in separate stories under the same cover, often after meeting (at a round table, naturally) presided over by their ersatz relation, Uncle Marvel. ***"The Marvel Family"*** feature, for all its 89-issue longevity, however, was in no way different in format from the other Fawcett strips in which the member characters appeared separately, except perhaps in that it managed to find common ground for the cartoony style of Mary's and Cap Sr.'s adventures with the more realistic of Jr.'s exploits. Further, since the origin of each of the members depended on that of one of the others, they could hardly have refrained from meeting at intervals, even had a feature not been created that specialized in their combined undertakings.

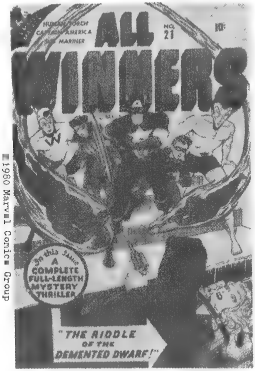
We have mentioned the All-Winners Squad as Marvel's (or rather, Timely's, to give the company its original name) only true super-team of the '40s. Unlike the JSA, however, they did not band together to fight the Axis powers in World War II. In fact, their only chronicled adventures were published in 1946, a year after the war's end, in ***ALL-WINNERS #19*** and **21**, and involved villains other than the Nazi hordes. (As an aside, it should be explained that the team wasn't really left out of ***ALL-WINNERS #20***, as it at first appears. Rather, ***ALL-WINNERS***



#19 which introduced the group was the final issue of title, much as ***AMAZING FANTASY #15*** which later premiered Spider-Man was the final issue of that comic. Meanwhile, another Timely title, ***YOUNG ALLIES***, changed its name to ***ALL-WINNERS*** for its final issue, **#21** in that series, and ***that*** comic featured the Squad's last case together. Talk about people who can empty a room by entering it... our ill-fated club of heroes seemingly fin-

ished off every comic they ever appeared together in.)

It does seem more than a little strange that the Timely heroes did not think to team up sooner. They came from diverse backgrounds, true, but so did the Justice Society members at DC, and yet they found common cause as a team united both against crime and against America's wartime enemies. Of Timely's three most popular characters, the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner had been around since 1939, when they debuted in the first issue of ***MARVEL MYSTERY COMICS*** (simply called ***MARVEL COMICS*** in that first issue only—and yes, Sub-Mariner had previously appeared in the ill-fated and long-undiscovered ***MOTION PICTURE FUNNIES WEEKLY***), and Captain America had existed since the premiere of his own title, which hit the stands roughly a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Torch and Subby met and fought in ***MARVEL MYSTERY #8*** through **10**, and again in ***HUMAN TORCH #5***, after which they became uneasy allies; and Torch's and Cap's kid sidekicks, Toro and Bucky, together with their mentors, met in battle against the Red Skull in ***YOUNG ALLIES #1*** in the Summer of '41. Why then, did they and/or the legion of other Timely characters not form a permanent organization to coordinate their efforts, other than the aforementioned Young Allies, until the brief appearance of the All-Winenrs at war's end? We would have to wait some thirty years for the answer to that question. •



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MARVEL COMICS

The following comics bear a ***May*** cover date and will be on sale in ***February*** (January shipping schedule):

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #75 — Written by TOM DeFALCO Pencils by ALAN KUPPERBERG The **Thing** and the ***Avengers*** take on Annihilus, Blastaar, and the Super-Adaptoid in a cosmic - scale battle for control of the Negative Zone ***Special double-sized 75th anniversary ish!***

SPIDER-WOMAN #38 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT Art by STEVE LEIALOHA and BRUCE PATTERSON The Web Lady teams up with special guest stars, the ***X-Men***, against the Juggernaut, Black Tom and the new Banshee!

STAR TREK #13 — Written by MARTIN PASKO Art by JOE BROZOWSKI and TOM PALMER Think you've seen space-spanning excitement? Think you've seen fantastic futuristic fantasy? Well, you ain't see nothin' till you've seen this month's turbulent tale of Captain Kirk a Enterprise crew! Don't miss it!

MARVEL SUPER HEROES #97 — Re-presenting, from Incredible Hulk #147, "The End of Doc Samson!", written by CONWAY with art by TRIMPE and J. SEVERIN Plus a classically comedic tale of Not Brand Echh s ineodible Bulk!

DAZZLER #3 — Written by TOM DeFALCO Pencils by JOHN ROMITA JR Dazz at the mercy of Marvel s most dastardly dobadder — ***Doctor Victor Von Doom***, himself!

KA-ZAR #2 — Written by BRUCE JONES Art by BRENT ANDERSON and CARLOS GARZON It's Ka-Zar and Shanna to the rescue when Leanne is kidnapped by the vicious, leather-winged ***Pterons!***

DAREDEVIL #170 — *Nope, because you demanded it — loudly, proudly, and often — **on sale monthly!*** Written by FRANK MILLER with art by MILLER and KLAUS JANSON Bullseye never misses And his next target is gonna be the DA's #1 witness, the reformed Kingpin, unless our resident Man Without Fear can come to the rescue!

SPIDEY SUPER STORIES #52 — Easy-readin' Super Hero pleasure for discriminating younger readers from magical Marvel and the incandescent Electric Company! Featuring Spidey and some special guests

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #218 — Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Art by JOHN ROMITA JR. and JIM MOONEY Spidey and the **Sub-Mariner** take on the all-new Frightful Four! If that's not action — then we don't know what is!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #257 — Written by ROGER STERN. Art by JOHN BYRNE and JOSEF RUBINSTEIN Three little words that'll set your heart aflutter: The ***Red Skull!***

THOR #307 — Written by RALPH MACCHIO and MARK GRUENWALD Art by KEITH POLLARD and CHIC STONE The god of thunder fights the weirdest battle of his life against the nightmare powered *Dream Demon!* And this month's *Tales of Asgard* features *Loki* — who's bound to be up to no good!

MICRONAUTS #29 — Written by BILL MANTLO Art by PAT BRODERICK and DANNY BULANDI *Doc Samson* (of Incredible Hulk fame) sends the Micros on a bizarre journey into the comatose Commander Rann's brain where they encounter the all-too real Nightmare!

GHOST RIDER #58 — Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER Art by DON PERLIN. Moondark's his name, magic's his game — and vengeance on Johnny Blaze is his mad obsession!

SAVAGE SHE-HULK #16 — Written by DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT Art by MIKE VOSBURG and FRANK SPRINGER All the She-Hulk s strength is useless against her newest foe — the invisible but lethal Microwaves!

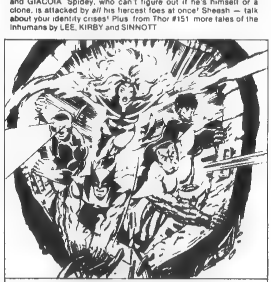
MOON KNIGHT #7 — Written by DOUG MOENCH Art by BILL SIENKIEWICZ and KLAUS JANSON An experiment in story telling by one of comicdom s most innovative creative teams sets the stage for a moonlit tale of murder and intrigue.

INCREDIBLE HUCK #259 — Written by BILL MANTLO Art by SAL BUSCEMA In the depths of Soviet Russia, ol' Greenskin teams up with the Super Soldiers (Ursus Major, Vanguard, the Crimson Dynamo, and Darkstar) to stop the world threatening menace of the combined power of Agent Sergei the Red Guardian and an all new, top-secret villain!

AVENGERS #207 — Plot by BOB BUDIANSKY Art by GENE COLAN and DAN GREEN Enter the Shadow Lord What is his mysterious secret? And why will he have to destroy the Avengers in order to save the Earth?

CONAN #122 — Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA Barbarian action hot heavy, and hard to resist Don t

MARVEL TALES #127 — Reprinting Amazing Spider-Man #150 Story by GOODWIN with pencils by KANE and inks by ESPOSITO and GIACOIA Spidey, who can't figure out if he's himself or a clone, is attacked by *all* his fiercest foes at once! Sheesh — talk about your identity crises! Plus: from Thor #151 more tales of the Inhumans by LEE, KIRBY and SINNOTT!



X-MEN #146 — *Featuring the return of the new X-Men's original trend-setting artist* **DAVE COCKRUM.** Script by CHRIS CLAREMONT Inks by TERRY AUSTIN. And if daring Dave's return wasn't news enough, this issue features Doctor Doom, Arcade, Havok, Polaris, Iceman, the original Banshee and a deadly little place known as "Murderworld!"

ROM #18 — Written by BILL MANTLO Art by SAL BUSCEMA. Rom vs. the ***X-Men!*** 'Nuff said? 'Nuff said!!

COMING ATTRACTIONS

MASTER OF KUNG FU #100 — Written by DOUG MOENCH Art by MIKE ZECK and GENE DAY *Special double-sized 100th anniversary extravaganza!* We worked overtime to make this issue special and we think you're gonna flip over what we came up with! It contains two searing stories the first one a tale of an evil scheme hatched some fifty years ago by Fu Manchu, which leads to the second as Fu's madness stretches across the decades to menace his son Shang Chi, in the present!

POWER MANIRON FIST #69 — Written by MARY JO DUFFY Art by KERRY GAMMILL and RICARDO VILLAMONTE When Luke and the Fist travel to sunny Florida to break up a sinister drug smuggling ring they get into more trouble than they bargained for — lots more!

MAN-THING #10 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT Art by DON PERLIN and BOB WIACEK You Marvel historians will remember *John Kovalski* from the pages of *War is Hell*. The rest of you will be meeting this deathly strange figure for the first time. Either way, you'll be shocked and stunned when you see the effect he has on the lives of Barbie Bannister John Daltry Jennifer and Andy Kale and a certain muck monster called Man Thing!

FANTASTIC FOUR #230 — Written by DOUG MOENCH Pencils by BILL SIENKIEWICZ The FF's final confrontation with the awesome Ebon Seeker! Guest-starring the mighty *Avengers!*

MARVEL TEAM-UP #105 — Written by TOM DeFALCO Art by HERB TRIMPE and MIKE ESPOSITO The savage She-Hulk and the sensational Spider-Man, together against the Man-Killer!

IRON MAN #148 — Written by DAVID MICHELINIE Pencils by JOHN ROMITA JR Is he an old foe, a new foe — or both? Either way, the armored Avenger's gonna face some stiff competition from the way out weaponry of Blacklash! And wait'll you find out the staggering secret of Vic Martinelli!

PETER PARKER #54 — Written by ROGER STERN Art by MARIE SEVERIN and BRUCE PATTERSON Why must Spidey put his life on the line to save his enemy, the Smuggler, from Maggia assassins? You think we're gonna tell you? Forget it — cough up the 50¢ and find out. Nyah!!

DEFENDERS #95 — Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS Art by DON PERLIN and PABLO MARCOS More on the mysterious Six-Fingered Hand. Nighthawk's new powers revealed the strange secret of Hellcat's mother. And if all that wasn't enough, the Defenders also have to take on the lord of the undead — *Count Dracula!*

MARVEL SUPER ACTION #31 — Originally presented in Avengers #70, written by THOMAS with art by S. BUSCEMA and GRAINGER. Showdown with the Squadron Sinister and the Grandmaster! Plus another off-beat tale of Marvel U.K.'s Incredible *Hulk!*

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #12 — Plot by PETER GILLIS Script by MICHAEL FLEISHER Pencils by JERRY BINGHAM He's back — in solo action! Captain Marvel!

STAR WARS #47 — Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS Art by CARMINE INFANTINO and TOM PALMER In their search for Han Solo, Lando Calrissian and Chewbacca pass through a dimensional rift and discover a seeming utopia created by former rebel hero Cody Sunn-Childe. But what strange secret does Sunn-Childe harbor — and will it even matter once the *Empire* strikes?!

MARVEL MAGAZINES

CRAZY #73 (cover dated April) — Cover by JIM SHERMAN. A Best of Crazy super special featuring more belly laughs than a ticklers convention. Plus, the all-new return of the fabulous *Puppets* written by STEVE SKEATES with art by JOHN ROMITA and RON ZALME. This Puppet show is called "Spider-Man TV Theatre with the Hulk" and you know it's gotta be wild! You get Puppets of Spidey, the Hulk, and all their hare-brained buddies, plus a five act teleplay, five backdrops, and all the necessary props. You've got to see it to believe it! and even then you won't be so sure!

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #63 (Cover dated April) — Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER. Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA. A savage world, a savage time, and a savage Barbarian hacking his way through both. But then, you knew that already didn't you? Guaranteed first-rate sword-and-sorcery adventure!

THE HULK #26 (Cover dated April) — Cover by JOE JUSKO. For openers we've got *"Nemesis!"* written by J.M. DeMATTEIS with art by GENE COLAN and ALFREDO ALCALA featuring a rare glimpse into Bruce Banner's past as the Hulk's alter-ego meets up with his college roommate who has become the leader of a controversial religious sect! And wait'll you see ol' Greenskin get into the act as he rips it up in bustling Times Square and a rustic upstate Ashram! Next, we've got a titanic tale written by LORA BYRNE with art by GENE COLAN and ALFREDO ALCALA entitled "Where Troops Are Encamped!" wherein we meet some die-hard Survivalists who will let nothing and no one — including our own green skinned Golem — endanger their plans for living through the coming holocaust! It's a wild one! And leave us not forget the newest installment of the adventures of that 1930's Hollywood swashbuckler, *Dominic Fortune*, written by DENNY O'NEIL with full-color painting by HOWARD CHAYKIN.

EPIC #5 (Spring, 1981) — Epic plows full speed ahead into its second triumph-tinged year of explosive creativity! And to celebrate we've got a colossal cover painting by, and an interview with, the BROTHERS HILDEBRANDT! And as if that wasn't enough to make this issue worth buying, we've also got the conclusion to Robert E. Howard's *Almuric* adapted by ROY THOMAS and TIM CONRAD; JIM STARLIN's *Metamorphosis Odyssey*; PEPE MORENO's *Flight Out*; RALPH MACCHIO and JOE JUSKO's *Because It's There*; RICK VEITCH's *Conquest of the Banana Planet*; BILL MANTLO and POLLY LAW's *Rising of the Moon*; and CHARLES VESS' *Jack Tales!* Truly, *the* Visual Odyssey!

While we still never knowingly print inaccurate information in these pages, Marvel Comics reserves the right to make any changes which may become necessary. We're sorry for any inconvenience this may cause. — The Bullpen

THE WEED OF CRIME BEARS...
MOON KNIGHT

by Kurt Busiek

Do you like Batman? Do you like the Shadow? Do you like Neal Adams? Then you might like ***MOON KNIGHT***. Moon Knight is a character who, from his beginning as an intriguing if secondary hero, in four years has evolved into a title character in his own monthly magazine.

Moon Knight has always been a creature of the night, and when he first appeared, he had a ***reason*** for being so, so that it made sense for him to spend his super-hero career in the dark. First off, he was fighting a werewolf (and one doesn't want to search out a werewolf in the bright sunlight—they're hard to find), and as a result of his clashes with the Werewolf By Night, he had super-strengths that waxed and waned with the moon. Not only did this guarantee him being a more effective super-hero if he fought at night, but it also spiced up the stories, with his strength changing across the course of the plot; so that he might want to delay a battle until he becomes strong enough or speed up a battle before he becomes too weak to fight his opponent. However, ***MOON KNIGHT #1*** threw out this werewolf-induced origin, to instead tell us that Marc Spector had died in the desert and was resurrected by Khonshu, an Egyptian moon god. This god was also a god of vengeance, which might supply some reason for it to resurrect Spector, but it's a slim excuse no matter how you cut it. Writer Moench has not seen fit to give us any more detail than this, except to invalidate the werewolf origin totally in ***#4***. So we are left with a ghostly figure of the night (who dresses almost completely in white, which is impractical), driven by vengeance, very agile, and possessed of gimmicks to help him in his crime-fighting (a truncheon, nunchaka, crescent-darts and a "glider-cape" so far). Also he's got what can only be described as a Moon-Copter.

SEVEN MINUTES LATER: AMSTERDAM AVENUE AT NINETY-NINTH STREET
I GOT THE JOB A FOR MY GLIDER CAPE FROM MOON KNIGHT'S FIRST ROP INTO ACTION!
IT'S NOT AS GOOD AS A REAL PARACHUTE OF COURSE -- OR EVEN A MANY GLIDER -- BUT GOOD ENOUGH TO GET ME DOWN IN ONE PIECE
AND THAT'S ALL I'M GONNA NEED TO CHOP BUSHMAN INTO THE LONGEST, HARDEST FALL HE'S EVER TAKEN

To find out more about this extremely Batman-like character, we have to travel back to one of Batman's predecessors, the Shadow. The Shadow had three identities, a soldier (Kent Allard), a millionaire (Lamont Cranston, wealthy young man-about-town), and a costumed avenger (the Shadow). To the doppelgangers to these three (Marc Spector, Steven Grant, and Moon Knight), Moench has added Jake Lockley, typical New York cabbie. Other than the multiple identities, and his propensity for shooting criminals right and left, the Shadow was not greatly different from Batman—although this does not make Batman a ripoff character. The reason is this: though the initial ideas for Batman drew heavily on the Shadow, Batman took off in a different direction, developed the ideas into a character with its own identity. The Shadow was feared by the underworld because he was unpredictable and dangerous. Batman added to this a distinctive costume and image, making him less of a grim, ferocious vigilante than an almost supernatural crusader for justice. And Batman, though driven by vengeance, is not fighting for vengeance, but for justice. He does not prey on the criminal element with their own weapons and methods, like the Shadow. He refuses to carry a gun, and he will not kill. All of this and more adds to a distinctive core to the character that separates him from the Shadow (making him "inspired" by the Shadow, but not a carbon copy).

Moon Knight, on the other hand, has taken the Shadow ideas, and brought them into a different direction too—Batman's direction. Moench is creating a core for his character that is so similar to the Caped Crusader's that you'd expect Captain Jean DeWolff of the NYPD to build a Moon-Signal to call on ***this*** darknight detective in times of trrouble. Also, this closeness to Batman and the Shadow in favor of Moon Knight's earliest self leads to another question: Why does a character with ***two*** supernatural

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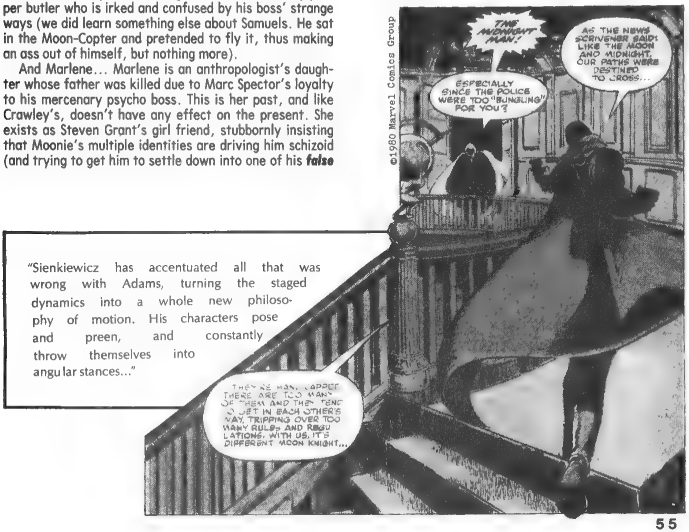
origins have nothing to do with the supernatural? He fights criminals, mercenaries, and crazies, but none of the spooks and hobgoblins you'd expect from the concept. Unfortunately, since Batman and the Shadow lose a little of their impact when anything more ethereal than them shows up, the answer becomes obvious: it would make Moon Knight too different.

One of the hallmarks of the ***MOON KNIGHT*** series is that it does little or no character work past character definition. In each of the four issues I've seen, Jake Lockley has entered supporting character Gena's diner with almost exactly the same line: "Hey Gena, how's the kids" (twice, and miniscule variants twice). She answers (twice) by telling us that they are black, and (twice) by telling us that Jake has hired them. This introduction of three supporting characters over, Jake talks to another supporter, Crawley, about whatever crime he's tracking down. Gena is a working woman, supporting her two kids, and is streetwise-but-compassionate. Her kids are total ciphers, existing only to further the plot. Crawley was a loquacious derelict, until we learned about his shady past in **#2**, at which point he stayed a loquacious derelict. His past doesn't matter to his character. Frenchie is a wartime pal of Moon Knight's, and mirrors Moonie's opinions on everything, except he's not bright enough to show any initiative or independent thought. Samuels is a very proper butler who is irked and confused by his boss' strange ways (we did learn something else about Samuels. He sat in the Moon-Copter and pretended to fly it, thus making an ass out of himself, but nothing more).

And Marlene... Marlene is an anthropologist's daughter whose father was killed due to Marc Spector's loyalty to his mercenary psycho boss. This is her past, and like Crawley's, doesn't have any effect on the present. She exists as Steven Grant's girl friend, stubbornly insisting that Moonie's multiple identities are driving him schizoid (and trying to get him to settle down into one of his ***false*** identities. She knew him as Marc Spector from the beginning. Why is she in love with Steven Grant?), and exhibiting whatever skills the current story should need, as do Frenchie and Gena's kids (Crawley merely exhibits whatever ***knowledge*** the story should need). You'll note that that makes eleven characters running around in the book, since Moonie's four selves have the trappings of four distinct personalities. And even though Samuels doesn't appear much, there are enough problems with the three sets of supporting characters each calling the main character by a different name, so that it's easy to tell why there isn't any character work done. There are too many people in the book, and they all seem to get involved in the action-adventure somehow.

As far as the adventures themselves go, Moon Knight seems to confine himself to the more human criminals, not super-villains like the rest of the Marvel line, but where Batman's criminal element was a "superstitious and cowardly lot," Moon Knight's adds an adjective: psychotic. In **#1**, he fought a pychotic mercenary who'd had his face tatooed to instill fear, so that he looks rather like the Joker (this resemblance, considering the character we're dealing with, and the fact that this major villcenary may well be the book's major villain, doesn't sound like coincidence). **#2** brings us a psychotic scythe-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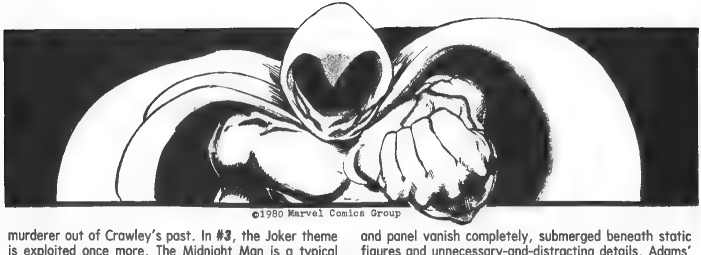
THE MIDNIGHT MAN!
AS THE NEWS SCRIVENER SAID! LIKE THE MOON AND MIDNIGHT, OUR PATHS WERE DESTINED TO CROSS...
ESPECIALLY SINCE THE POLICE WERE TOO "BUNGLING" FOR YOU!
"Sienkiewicz has accentuated all that was wrong with Adams, turning the staged dynamics into a whole new philosophy of motion. His characters pose and preen, and constantly throw themselves into angular stances..."
THERE ARE MANY KNIGHTS. THERE ARE TOO MANY OF THEM AND THEY TEND TO GET IN EACH OTHER'S WAY, TRIPPING OVER TOO MANY RULES AND REGULATIONS. WITH US, IT'S DIFFERENT. MOON KNIGHT...



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murderer out of Crawley's past. In **#3**, the Joker theme is exploited once more. The Midnight Man is a typical Batman villain. He has a fixation with greed and with midnight. All his crimes take place at midnight, and as he explains, "greed is the purest motivation" (Anyone out there remember the Joker and the natural superiority of insanity?). The Midnight Man is also set up to return. Then in **#4**, we meet the Committee of Five, of whom two are clearly psychotic and the others aren't much better. Now, there's nothing wrong with psychotic villains, but every issue is a little much. The Committee of Five is hardly original, either, finding doppelgangers all over comics (Dr. Tzin-Tzin's deadly dozen, etc.) but for their true forebears we have to take one step over from ***THE SHADOW*** into another pulp magazine. If the Committee of Five could find a Doc Savage to lead them, they might actually be able to cause Moon Knight some trouble.

If the character and adventures are derivative, all one really needs is a derivative artist, and Moench has found the perfect penciller in Bill Sienkiewicz. It's odd, that if an artist tries to look like Jim Steranko (e.g. Paul Gulacy) or Jack Kirby (Keith Giffen, early Barry Smith), they are noted as derivative and are sniped at as such. But if someone outrightly swipes Neal Adams or John Buscema, they are treated by fandom as a worthwhile artist and, more likely than not, a good one. It took quite a while for Rich Buckler to be considered less-than-original, even though he changes "styles" like another artist might change pencils, and I still hear praise for Mike Nasser's "innovative" style. Bill Sienkiewicz, I am told, simply walked in to the Marvel offices with a portfolio under his arm and was immediately accepted. It didn't seem to matter to the editors that his style is stolen from Adams right down to the signature, nor that actual panels were lifted from Adams' work. What gets me is that Sienkiewicz disdains Adams, right down to intimating the Moon Knight is not only ***not*** derivative of the Adams Batman, but actually superior (on the cover of ***COMICS JOURNAL #54***).

As an Adams ripoff, Sienkiewicz isn't even a particularly good one. Buckler and Nasser both understand the necessity for a dynamic page layout, as well as panel layout. Slenkiewicz has settled for trying to imitate Adams' figure work, and letting the storytelling aspect of page and panel vanish completely, submerged beneath static figures and unnecessary-and-distracting details. Adams' figures were always positioned for dramatic effect, and though the result often came off as stagy, it was at least funcitonal and exciting. Sienkiewicz has accentuated all that was wrong with Adams, turning the staged dynamics into a whole new philosophy of motion. His characters pose and preen, and continually throw themselves into angular stances that neither add to the storytelling ot even look exciting. To counter the fact that his characters look like statues, Sienkiewicz continually throws in Adams-esque action lines, so you can tell where the characters have been. This graphic gimmick, that some artists use extremely well, serves to cover up even more of the convoluted panels with thin squiggly lines. If comics as a medium is storytelling, as many people have insisted, then whatever Bill Sienkiewicz is drawing, it isn't comics.

Throughout comics history, writers and artists have borrowed from each other when their own ingenuity failed. There is a point, however, beyond which it ceases to become borrowing and begins to become ripoff. The Justice League appearing in ***THE AVENGERS*** as the Squadron Supreme was parody. The Legion of Superheroes popping up in ***THE NEW X-MEN*** as the Imperial Guard was homage. Spider-Man's newspaper-involved private life was minor borrowing from Superman's obviously effective secret ID. Jack Kirby's Forager, when included in ***THE MICRONAUTS*** as Bug, borders on ripoff, but it's difficult to tell. There are many instances, but Moon Knight is the purest example of unadulterated ripoff. Rather than swiping here and there to add to a character's sales ability, or to improve uninteresting parts of the concept, Moon Knight has stolen his very ***appeal***, his underlying reason for being, from Batman and the Shadow. Whatever he has to recommend him has been done before, and done in almost exactly the same form. ***MOON KNIGHT*** is so blatant that it comes down to a simple question of whether originality still has anything to do with comics. ***MOON KNIGHT*** should never stand a chance in the market, and if he succeeds, it will simply show that comics fans will sit still for absolutely anything.

Crime does pay.

MOON KNIGHT knows. •

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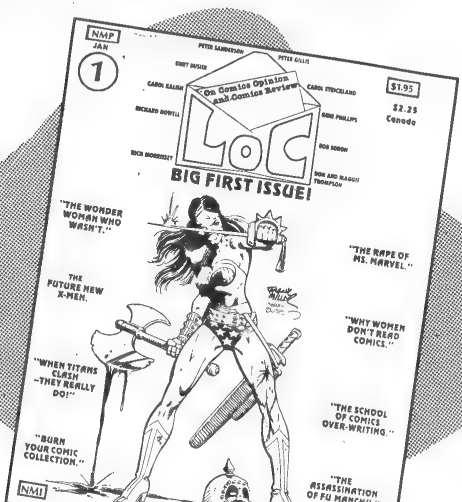

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Superman is particularly susceptible to the charms of women who, like him, have super-powers. He usually rationalizes this by stating that if he married an ordinary woman, it would be too easy for his enemies to avenge themselves on him by hurting or killing his wife. But in one particularly repellent story, "The Secrets of Superman's Fortress" (***ACTION*** #395, Dec. '70), the Man of Steel tells Althera, a member of an imperialistic race of space Amazons, that in her, "After all these years, I've found the one woman fit for a superman!"(p.12). This is actually even more appalling than it sounds taken out of context, because Althera is the commander of a slave-hunting expedition which has been hunting down the primitive inhabitants of a jungle world in order to put them to work mining a substance called ergonite. Superman has been protecting the primitive tribespeople from the off-world invaders, but as soon as he sees the leader of this reprehensible crew, he falls in love. "Althera...a beautiful goddess and incredibly strong...yet her voice is melodious...like a bell, even when she commands!"(p. 8), he thinks, watching the space Amazons with telescopic vision. But beauty and a melodious voice seem to be Althera's only assets, aside from a moderate degree of super-strength which she demonstrates by catching and holding — but only for a few seconds — a huge boulder which falls on top of her. Besides being an arrogant bigot who refuses to believe that anyone not of her own Vrandar race could be the equal of her and her crew (much less possess the superior powers that Superman displays), Althera is a typical male comics writer's caricature of an Amazon — in other words, a man-hater. As one of her officers points out, "The fundamental laws of our race [state that] it is forbidden to respect or admire males! The opposite sex is fit only to be servants and slaves!"(p.10). On top of all this, Althera sees nothing wrong in what she and her crew are doing to the harmless people of the jungle planet. Her only complaint about her morally repugnant job is, "I'm sick of this assignment...I'm a warrior, not a slave hunter!"(p.8). It's hard to see how any of this makes her "the one woman fit for a superman" when that superman is supposedly the idealistic embodiment of truth, justice, and the American way — the ideal American way of freeing and giving opportunity to the weak and helpless, not enslaving and oppressing them.

OH NO, ALTHERA — WE CAN NEVER MARRY!! AND IT'S NOT BECAUSE YOU'RE A SPACE CRIMINAL, OR A SLAVER, OR THAT YOU'RE AN AMAZON WHO HATES MEN!! NO, IT'S BECAUSE (AS MY SUPER-COMPUTER REVEALS) YOU'RE REALLY AND TRULY A BIRD-WOMAN!!
:BOB!: HOW TERRIBLE, SUPERMAN! WHAT AN UNEXPECTED END TO OUR OTHERWISE PERFECT MATCH!

However, Superman sees none of this. He only parts from his unlikely new love because he discovers that, because the Vrandars are "an avian race,' related to the birds," "You and I are of two different species, Althera!" "And... and there can never be anything between us!" The space Amazon sobs on cue (p. 14).

It seems a little hard to understand why the fact that his Vrandar beloved is of a different species should matter so much to a man who had earlier in his career claimed

A continuation of "Superman's Women."
By Margaret O'Connell

to be willing, even eager, to marry a mermaid, Lori Lemaris. ("Superman's Mermaid Sweetheart" ***SUPERMAN*** #135, Feb. '60). In fact, everyone on Earth except his cousin Supergirl is probably of a different species from the super-powered Kryptonian, unless DC has secretly subscribed all along to the "chariots of the gods" theory that Terrans and Kryptonians are just different branches of some ancient starfaring humanoid race (recently put forward by Elliot S. Maggin in the Superman novel). Be that as it may, at the end of the story we find the Man of Steel back in his Fortress of Solitude, sadly contemplating one of the plumes from Althera's head and thinking, "Oh, Althera! How beautiful it might have been! But it could never... never!" (p. 14).

Another rather odd romance between Superman and a super-powered woman from another planet is described in "When Supergirl Played Cupid" (reprint ***GIANT ADVENTURE*** #390, April '70—though the story was obviously written much earlier, when Jim Mooney was still drawing all Supergirl stories). In this tale, Supergirl, obsessed with the fear that her cousin Superman will "be an unhappy bachelor forever," tries to "play Cupid [and] fix it so he'll meet the right girl" (p. 3). Unfortunately, her attempts to pair him off with Helen of Troy in the ancient past, and the adult Saturn Girl in the future (who turns out to be already married to the grown-up Lightning Lad) are both unsuccessful. When Supergirl confesses to having attempted to meddle with his love life, her cousin's reply borders on an admission of incestuous affection for her. "If I ever did marry..." Kal-El says, "...it would be to someone super and lovable like... you! We can't marry because we're cousins! Though cousins can marry in certain countries here on Earth... we're both from the planet Krypton, where the marriage of cousins is unlawful!" (p. 10). This sounds awfully close to a declaration that if it weren't for that stuffy old Kryptonian law, he'd marry Kara tomorrow. What makes the whole thing even weirder is the fact that at the time this story was originally published, DC was still insisting that Superman was old enough to be Supergirl's father. (There is something like seven years between them today.)

At this point, Supergirl gets an inspiration and rushes to the Fortress of Solitude's super-computer, only to announce almost immediately, "Hooray! Screening all possible factors, it indicates a superwoman duplicate of me exists on the planet Stary! I beg you to go there, Superman! You owe it to yourself to discover if she's the mate for you!" (p. 10). The Man of Steel quickly complies, thinking, "Can I find a girl there [on Stary!] as wonderful as Supergirl?" (p. 11). He does, and he and "adult Super-

MOMENTS LATER...
WOW!--A SECOND KISS, UNDER ANOTHER MISTLETOE!.. WEDDING BELLS, GET READY TO CHIME!.
HEY, WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY KISSING MY WIFE TWICE, SUPERMAN?.. DON'T OVERDO THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT!
YOUR WIFE, LIGHTNING MAN?.. --ER, THIS PARTY HAS BEEN GREAT FUN, BUT I'VE GOT TO RETURN TO THE PAST NOW!
MMM! SATURN WOMAN'S M-MARRIED!-- STUPID ME! WHY DIDN'T I TRY TO KINDLE A SPARK BETWEEN SUPERMAN AND PHANTOM WOMAN INSTEAD. SHE'S PROBABLY SINGLE!
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EARTH'S YELLOW SUN RAYS, WHICH MAKE ME SUPER-POWERFUL, AFFECT YOU DESTRUCTIVELY, THE WAY GREEN KRYPTONITE'S RAYS HARM ME!.. YOU CAN NEVER... LIVE ON EARTH! I'LL STAY HERE!
NO! EARTH NEEDS YOU! GO!—FORGET ME!
I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU!
AS SUPERMAN RETURNS TO EARTH AND EXPLAINS TO SUPERGIRL...
:SOB:—IT'S ALL MY FAULT, FOR T-TRYING TO RUSH YOU INTO MARRIAGE! I PROMISE NEVER TO MEDDLE IN YOUR ROMANTIC LIFE AGAIN! :SOB!:
PLEASE DON'T CRY...
©1960 DC Comics

girl" Luma Lynai fall in love at first sight. After a whirlwind courtship that appears to last no more than a few hours, Superman pops the question: "Come to Earth with me, Luma Lynai! I know you'll love my world! If you're happy there, we'll wed!" "I want to be wherever you are, darling!" Luma replies (p. 11). Unfortunately, as soon as Luma comes within range of the rays of Earth's sun, she begins to lose her powers and suffer agonizing pain. Superman hastily carries her back to Staryl, where he explains that he has deduced, "Earth's yellow sun rays, which make me a super-powerful, affect you destructively, the way green Kryptonite's rays harm me! ...You can never... live on Earth! I'll stay here!" But Luma Lynai rejects this uncharacteristically generous offer, saying, "No! Earth needs you! Go!—Forget me!" even as she thinks, "I'll always love you..." (p. 12). No explanation is offered of why Earth, which even at this relatively early stage has at least half a dozen other superheroes (including Supergirl) capable of taking over for the Man of Steel, needs Superman more than Staryl needed Luma Lynai, who was willing to leave her planet without a backward glance, although she appears to be its only resident superhero.

Saved from the shackles of matrimony once more, Kal-El returns to Earth and the Fortress of Solitude. There he finds Supergirl crying her heart out, wailing, "Sob! It's all my fault, for t-trying to rush you into marriage! I promise never to meddle in your romantic life again! Sob!" Superman, amazingly composed for a man who has just ended a tragic love affair, says only, "Please don't cry... maybe fate had a purpose in foiling your three attempts to get me married off!" (p. 12). The only emotion he displays throughout this brave speech is concern for the over-emotional Supergirl, who seems much more upset over the whole affair than he is.

Another unfortunate romance that Superman survives with heart virtually unscathed is the one which prompts "The Lois Lane-Lana Lang Truce" (**LL** #52, Oct. '64). In this story, Lois and Lana unite to combat the common menace of Illena, a beautiful visitor from the planet Kromal who charms Superman by telling him she came all the way to Earth just to meet him, then keeps him interested by revealing that she has one super-power, the nature of which she refuses to divulge. As Lois and Lana discover, Illena's super-power is the ability to turn living beings to stone, and she plans to use it on the Man of Steel to fulfill her assassin's contract with the Superman Revenge Squad. Lois and Lana foil this dastardly scheme, but when they tell Superman about his new flame's nefarious plot, he betrays nothing more than astonishment and mild disappointment as she exclaims, "Illena—a Revenge Squad secret agent!! Well, I'll be a three-eyed Kryptonian babootch!!" (p. 8).

DC
GIRL FRIEND
LOIS LANE
"The TRUCE BETWEEN LOIS LANE and LANA LANG!"
LANA'S NOW SUPERWOMAN'S PAL! THAT SINCE SHE'S ENGAGED TO ME, WE REALLY MUST DO SOMETHING TO KEEP THEM APART!
RIGHT LOIS! WE'LL DECLARE A TRUCE UNTIL WE FIND A COMMON ENEMY!
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Another love whose loss seems to affect the Man of Steel very little is Lahla of the planet of the Thorones, where he finds himself "Superman—Weakest Man in the World!" (***ACTION*** #321, Feb, '65). The cruel, super-strong people of this planet imprison Superman and plan to invade Earth, but Lahla, a super-strong woman with a soft spot for weak, gentle men, frees him and helps him escape and ruin the Thorones' plan to invade Earth by permanently eclipsing their sun, the source of their super-powers. After knowing Lahla only a day or two, Superman thinks, "She's really a darling, and seems to love me deeply! And I... I seem always to be strongly attracted to 'LL' girls! I'm afraid I'd face some terrific complications if we ever get out of this..." (p. 12). When they do get out of it, and Superman takes Lahla to Metropolis, he tells Lois, "She's madly in love with me, and I... I owe her so much, I can never leave her!" But before Lois, who has surely saved Superman from Kryptonite and other menaces often enough for him to owe her as much as he owes Lahla, can react to this remarkable statement, Lahla herself breaks off the engagement because she has discovered that "away from my world, you're the strongest man in the universe." As the Thorone woman explains, "I've known and disliked super-strong men all my life... I fell in love with you because you were the weakest man on my world! But it's all over now! I've a new sweetheart!" As a meek bespectacled little man steps forward, Lahla adds, "This Earthman is the lovable, weak man I thought you were, and we're going out to find a world where we can be happy together!" (p. 14). With this, Lahla flies off with her new boyfriend under her arm. Superman, far from being brokenhearted or even relieved at getting out of a marriage that he had agreed to at least partly from a sense of duty, is merely puzzled. "She loved me when I was the weakest man in the world, but turned me down when I regained my powers! It doesn't make sense... it's silly!" he protests to Lois, who predictably replies, "All girls are that way... Me, for instance! I'm silly enough to have a crush on a big, bone-

LORI! I-I'D GIVEN UP ALL HOPES OF EVER ACTUALLY SEEING YOU AGAIN! BUT I'VE NEVER FORGOTTEN YOU...
I KNOW! MANY TIMES IN FAR-OFF ATLANTIS, WHEN I FELT ALONE AND BLUE, I READ YOUR THOUGHTS! I CAN READ THEM NOW! MAY I ANSWER THEM? -- YES! YOU MAY KISS ME!
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headed Superman!" (p. 14). This rather situation-comedy-like ending, and the mild disappointment Superman appears to experience when he loses Luma Lynai and Illena of Kromal, are a far cry from the agonies Lois Lane has to suffer whenever she falls for someone else.

Most of Superman's remaining involvements with women seem almost to have been deliberately designed to prove Michael Fleisher's contention that "on those occasions when Superman could feel subconsciously secure that his relationship of the moment... would not survive, he has expressed the willingness to abandon his super-heroic career in favor of matrimony" (***THE GREAT SUPERMAN BOOK***, p. 409)—or at least to marry without raising the objection that his dangerous occupation makes such an official commitment impossible. Even the romance with Lahla just decribed could be viewed in these terms. Superman knows from the start, even if he doesn't admit it to himself, that Lahla's admiration for him has some connection with the fact that he is the weakest man on her world, or at least with her hatred of "the way [her people] use their great strength" (***ACTION #321***, p. 6). Thus, despite his protests that her behavior once they reach Earth "doesn't make sense," he can indeed be subconsciously sure from the beginning that Lahla's infatuation with him will not survive the revelation that he is not really "the lovable, weak man I thought you were" (p. 14).

As Fleisher points out, the really classic case of Superman's willingness to marry only when he subconsciously knows that circumstances beyond his control will prevent it is the romance with Lori Lemaris chronicled in ***"The Girl in Superman's Past"*** (***SUPERMAN #129***, May '59) and ***"Superman's Mermaid Sweetheart"*** (***SUPERMAN #135***, Feb. '60). The insuperable stumbling block to this union, of course, is the fact that Lori is a mermaid and cannot survive outside her undersea home unless her body is immersed in salt water for at least eight hours a day. This difference in habitat in itself would not be much of a problem for Superman, who is so invulnerable that he doesn't even need to breathe and could thus live underwater in Atlantis with no more trouble than he has on land. However, although the Comics Code prohibits any explicit reference to such vulgar matters, the fact remains that Lori is a fish from the waist down, which would apparently make it biologically impossible for her and Superman to do more than kiss. This appears to be what Lori really means by such oblique statements like, "A love like ours just isn't meant to be!", and why she keeps refusing Superman's proposals of marriage even when he offers to "quit the surface world forever" to live with her in Atlantis. (***"Superman's Mermaid Sweetheart,"*** p. 6). When she finally runs out of flimsy excuses not to marry the Man of Steel (it's her duty to stay with her people, the elders of Atlantis might not give permission for him to live there, etc.), Lori takes the drastic step of falling in love with another man—a merman. At this, Superman finally admits defeat and returns to his old Lois-and-Clark routine on land.

Superman's relationship with Lyla Lerrol, a beautiful blonde emotion-movie actress he meets when he acci-

dentally breaks through the time-space barrier (and ends up stranded on Krypton in the time immediately after his parents' marriage and before his own birth) is also a commitment made in the subconscious certainty that it will never have to be honored. Although Kal-El cannot foresee that he himself will escape Krypton's destruction a second time when he is accidentally shot into space in a prop rocket being used in Lyla's latest emotion-movie, he does know when he arrives there that Krypton and all its inhabitants have only a year or two to survive, at most. As Fleisher points out, "It is as though Superman had chosen the love of his life from a terminal cancer ward; no matter which mate he selected, their relationship could not possibly endure" (***THE GREAT SUPERMAN BOOK***, p. 421).

The situation of Lorna Martin, in ***"The Girl Who Worshipped Clark Kent"*** (***ACTION #411***, April '72), is somewhat similar to that of Lyla Lerrol, though the fact that Lorna, like the Kryptonian actress doomed to die with her planet, is not long for this world is not explicitly stated until the end of the story. Still, the fact that Lorna passes out after the mild exertion of a short stroll must make Clark suspect that there is something seriously wrong with her, even though he tries to convince himself that "the excitement of the day was just too much for her!" (p. 2). In fact, it is not until after this has happened, and Lorna has revealed that she is really a visitor from another dimension who had discovered years ago that he was Superman, but liked him as Clark Kent even before that, that Clark begins to feel the desire for a serious relationship with her. His interest in her seems to grow as Lorna herself continues to fade under the debilitating effects of increased exposure to Earth's divergent time factor. It is only after Lorna, nearly dead from having artificially aged to the equivalent of 250 Earth years, is forcibly dragged back into her own dimension by two other-dimensional policemen sent for that purpose, that Clark realizes, too late, that this was a woman he could have settled down with, convinced that she loved him for himself alone and not just for the glamor and power of Superman. "For once, there was someone who loved meek Clark Kent instead of Superman!" Clark thinks ruefully, gazing at Lorna's "dozens of pictures of Clark... and only one of Superman." "Lorna... I'll always remember you—as you once were!" (p. 7).

Even in situations in which he manages to break out of his super-stoical he-man rolé and express genuine emotion at the thought of losing his latest love, the Man of Steel is hampered by his obsessive insistence on being loved as plain Clark Kent, not Superman. Even in some stories printed in the early '70s, Kal-El remains unalterably convinced that any woman who falls in love with him in his Superman identity must be attracted solely by his fame and super-powers, caring nothing for him as a person. The Man of Steel is continually having thoughts like, "I'm always afraid girls don't love me for myself—are merely dazzled by my fame and super-powers. I wonder how it would feel to be really loved—for myself??! I guess... I'll never know!" (The Sweetheart Superman Forgot," ***SUPERMAN*** #165, Nov. '63, rpt ***GIANT SUPERMAN*** #222, p. 12).

Superman frequently expresses doubts about the sincerity of Lois and Lana's affection for him, and the writers go to some pains to justify this distrust of the two womens' reasons for loving him. In "I Betrayed Superman" (***LL*** #98, Jan. '70, rpt ***SUPERMAN FAMILY*** #176), a young actor named Johnny who hopes to prove that he can be convincing in the part of a lover, despite the doubts of his director, impersonates Superman to audition for the role of Samson in a production of ***Samson and Delilah*** in which Lois Lane has been cast as Delilah. When Lois, to her own astonishment, actually manages to cut off a lock of "Superman's" hair during the first rehearsal, the phony Man of Steel pretends to have lost his powers, like the original Samson, and immediately seizes the opportunity to propose to Lois, exclaiming, "I'm an ordinary man now! My career is over! Who would threaten the wife of a nobody? Will you marry me?" When Lois hesitates, the infuriated "Superman" shouts, "So! This proves you were attracted to my glamor! My reputation! Now that my image has been shattered, you're not sure you really want to marry me! Admit it" (p. 9). The astonishment of the director and the other spectators turns to amusement when the actor unmasks, but Lois, badly shaken, is left doubting her own feelings. Back at the ***Daily Planet***, she thinks worriedly, "Was Johnny right? Am I only attracted by Superman's glamor as a world-famous figure? Am I that fickle? Or did I subconsciously sense that Johnny wasn't really Superman? Will I ever know?" (p. 10).

The willingness to fall in love with any good-looking man with super-powers displayed by both Lois and Lana in a number of '50s and '60s stories published in Lois's own book reinforces the impression that even the women who have worshipped Superman for years may really love only the superhero and not the man. Perhaps the most absurd expression of Superman's fear that even the long-suffering Lois wouldn't care about him if he weren't a powerful celebrity is on the cover of ***LOIS LANE*** #89, Jan. '69, which portrays a scene from an imaginary story featuring Superman's girlfriend as "The Bride of Batman." In this scene the Man of Steel, sadly eyeing the happy couple as they take their vows at the altar, thinks enviously, "Lucky Bruce Wayne! Lois doesn't know he's Batman! She's marrying him for himself!" What renders this utterly ridiculous is the fact that even in his secret identity of Bruce Wayne, Batman belongs to a group notorious for worrying that they weren't loved for themselves long before superheroes were even invented—the rich.

Although Lois Lane is now assumed to be free of ulterior motives for adoring the Man of Steel, at least for the moment, the notion that even longtime female admirers of Superman are only interested in the public personality and not the person is spotlighted once again in the late '70's run of ***SUPERMAN*** issues written by Marty Pasko. This time it's Lana Lang Kal-El accuses of being "not in love—you're star-struck! You want reflected

glory... what you imagine to be the glamor of being 'Mrs. Superman'! And sometimes... I think that's all you ever wanted..." ("The Eternity Cage," ***SUPERMAN*** #332, Feb. '79, p. 17). Judging by the blatantly predatory approach to catching "her" man Pasko had Lana indulge in as soon as she re-entered the Man of Steel's life two years before, by the time this confrontation occurred, the reader was supposed to be wholeheartedly in agreement with Superman's conviction that the redheaded reporter doesn't really care about him or his feelings, just the "reflected glory" she'd reap as his wife. Lana's suspiciously rapid infatuation with Vartox, a super-hero who temporarily took refuge on Earth under the fictitious identity of GBS security officer Vernon O'Valeron (***ACTION*** #498-499) after his own planet exploded, tends to support this view of Lana as glorified superhero groupie and would-be star collector.

This unflattering portrayal of Lana's motives is something of a throwback to the negative attitude toward marriage-minded females embodied in those stories. At least in stories written in the early '60s in which Superman is obsessed with the idea of being loved for himself alone, but is so pathologically afraid of letting any woman get close to him (as Fleisher would have it)—or, more realistically, is so limited by the misogynist overtones of the conception of the ideal American male that he embodies—that he will resort to flimsy excuses to break off with even a woman who unquestionably loves him as an ordinary human being. The ultimate proof of this is the Man of Steel's relationship with Sally Selwyn.

Superman meets Sally in ***"The Sweetheart Superman Forgot"*** (***SUPERMAN #165***, Nov. '63), when he wanders onto her wealthy father's ranch after Red Kryptonite causes him to lose his memory and super-powers for an extended period of time. The amnesiac, powerless Superman, here using the name "Jim White" in a compulsive attempt to conceal his amnesia from the Selwyns, falls in love with Sally and actually gives her an engagement ring after he's known her for only a few days. For her part, Sally loves "Jim White" so much that, far from being attracted to him only because of superficial qualities like fame and glamor, she is still eager to marry him even after his legs are paralyzed by a fall from a horse. But at this point, "Jim" himself tries to break off the engagement, ostensibly because he fears that Sally's love for him has now turned to pity, but probably at least partly because of his typical compulsion to avoid making a permanent romantic commitment. This particular story ends with Superman recovering his powers and memory, but forgetting everything that happened while he was under the influence of Red Kryptonite, so the situation is left unresolved.

However, Superman does meet Sally again in ***"The Man Who Stole Superman's Secret Life"*** (***SUPERMAN #169***, May '64), and finally remembers her when she flings her arms around him in his Clark Kent identity and kisses him. His initial reaction is to resume his relationship with Sally with the intention of marrying her. "To think that all along I've had the love of a beautiful girl who loves me for myself alone—not just for my fame as Superman!... Now that I've found her, I don't want to lose her again, ever!" (pp. 10-11). While trying to decide just what to do, Superman falls asleep and dreams of Lois and Lana weeping and telling each other, "Sob—Superman says he's marrying Sally because he knows she loves him for himself, not his fame! But I've always loved him that way, too, Lana!" "Sob, sob—So have I, Lois! But—he didn't believe me, either!" Apparently unmoved by this spectacle of heartbreak, and unshaken in his conviction that Lois and Lana love not him, but the idea of being "Mrs. Superman," Clark awakens and decides, "I'll marry her! Why not? I love her and she loves me—and I may never again find a girl who truly loves me for myself!" (p. 11). But, as Fleisher points out, "it was only Superman's amnesiac state that had allowed him to overcome his unconscious fear of intimacy" in the story in which he first met Sally. At the end of this story of his second encounter with Sally Selwyn, Superman once again "flees this relationship and the emotional involvement it represents, rationalizing that he can never marry due to the fact that his wife would inevitably become the target of underworld retribution" (***THE GREAT SUPERMAN BOOK***, p. 422).

As is obvious from the description above, in this second Sally Selwyn story Clark Kent continually emphasizes the importance of the fact that Sally loves him for himself, not for his Superman identity. The author of the story also insists upon this point, labelling Sally "the one girl who loved Clark Kent for himself, not because he was secretly the Man of Steel!" (p. 1). But as Michael Fleish-

"By the time this confrontation occurred, the reader was supposed to be wholeheartedly in agreement with Superman's conviction that the redheaded reporter doesn't really care about him or his feelings, just the 'reflected glory' she'd reap as his wife."

er makes clear in his account of the "Jim White"-Sally Selwyn romance, this decription is inaccurate. "In the course of his romance with Sally Selwyn, Superman does indeed wear the clothing and eyeglasses characteristic of his role as reporter Clark Kent, but he does not exhibit the spineless timidity which Lois Lane finds so repellingly offensive." In fact, as "Jim White," Superman/Clark is conspicuously courageous, risking his life to save Sally and her father from some dynamite carelessly left in the open by workmen, and later insisting on riding the wildest bronco at the rodeo in the hope of winning a $5,000 prize with which to start his own business and support Sally after they are married. Because he combines this un-Clark Kentlike courage with such un-Supermanlike qualities as willingness to admit that he does love Sally and would like to spend the rest of his life with her, "Jim White" is neither the unappealing Clark Kent figure that Superman apparently thinks of as his real self, nor the overwhelmingly glamorous larger-than-life hero he is in his public role as a super-hero. In Fleisher's words, the man whom Sally Selwyn loves for himself alone is:

"...the perfect blend of both Clark Kent and Superman —'kind, as well as manly,' gentle yet forthright, individualistic and courageous.

"The fatal flaw in the relationship is that Superman is psychologically free to abandon his oppressive Clark Kent -Superman duality only so long as he is afflicted with total amnesia. Having forgotten completely who he really is —that he is an alien from outer space with superhuman powers—Superman becomes somehow free to merge the two extremes of his tortured personality into a single wholesome individual." (***THE GREAT SUPERMAN BOOK***, p. 421)

Once Superman regains his memory, all his old behavior patterns return in full force, including the one that forever prevents him from making a permanent commitment to any woman, even if she appears to have all the qualifications of the dream girl he claims to have been searching for all his life.

Like his fears that women don't love him for himself, Superman's traditional deep-seated aversion to the idea of marriage is justified over and over again by the writers in imaginary stories which almost invariably portray the results of the Man of Steel's marriage as messy, acrimonious, or downright tragic. In these stories, "Mr. and Mrs. Superman's" wedding inexorably leads to every kind of disaster imaginable, from the break-up of the Superman-Batman team because of a quarrel between their wives ("The Sons of Batman and Superman," ***WORLD'S FINEST*** #154, Dec. '65) through arguments between Lois and her super-husband over his supposed continued fascination with old flames like Lana and Lori Lemaris ("The Wife of Superman," ***LL*** #23, Feb. '61, and "The Girl Who Hated Superman," ***LL*** #39, Feb. '63) to the death and/or mutilation of either husband or wife, usually at the hands of some vengeful super-villains ('The Death of Lois Lane," ***SUPERMAN*** #194, Feb. '67, "Superman's Tragic Marriage," ***SUPERMAN*** #215, April '69, and others). One story, "The Three Wives of Superman" (***LL*** #51, Aug. '64), pulls out all the stops as Superman first marries Lois, then Lana, then Lori Lemaris, only to have each tragically struck down within a year after the wedding, Lois from the harmful side effects of a super-serum her new husband prepares for her, and the other two by super-villains. In "Love Is Blind" (***LL*** #91, April '69), Superman finally marries Lois only after she is blinded by a ray gun blast meant for him (he apparently never does tell her his secret identity in this one). But when their super-daughter, Lisa, is no more than nine or ten years old, the Man of Steel is apparently killed by exploding nuclear warheads containing a mixture of red and green Kryptonite. Later it is revealed that Superman did not die, but was permanently transformed into a grotesquely deformed super-hunchback, who abandons Earth forever when Lois, who has finally regained her sight, shrinks back in involuntary revulsion at his appearance. The end of the story does hold out some hope as Lisa, known to the public as Superlass, secretly follows her father to an uninhabited planet so she can locate him if she and Lois someday "find an antidote for the K effect" (p.23), but the overall picture is pretty bleak.

This trend towards stories that present Superman's marriage as little more than a signal for disaster can be partially explained by the fact that even in an imaginary tale, in which the writer is free to rearrange the entire DC universe, it is easier to think of ways for things to go wrong excitingly than it is to come up with an interesting plot in which everything is basically all right. However, the fact that I have been able to find exactly two imaginary stories in which Superman's marriage has only positive results for all concerned, but dozens in which it leads to nothing but trouble, suggests that the comics creators who produced these tales did have a strong subconscious conviction that marriage is a rather unfortunate occurrence which at best causes a man to dwindle into a henpecked husband and at worst causes him to in some sense lose his very life, of his loved ones, as well as his freedom.

Both of the happy-ending Superman marriage stories are conspicuous for their methodical tying-up of every loose end which could possibly mar the universal bliss. In "Lana Lang's Romance with Superman VI" (***LL*** #36, Oct. '62, rpt ***GIANT LL*** #86), Superman marries Lois Lane after he discovers a serum which gives her permanent super-powers, and they have the usual imaginary marriage story boy-and-girl twins. Lana Lang tries hard to be a good sport about the whole thing, but finds being a close friend of the super-family agonizing because she is constantly reminded of the man she has lost and the adorable children that could have been hers. However, this problem is solved when Lana volunteers to test a new time machine and winds up hundreds of years in the future, where she meets and falls in love with Superman VI, who is an exact double of his ancestor, the original Superman. This time, the feeling is mutual. The story ends with Lana, too, getting permanent super-powers from a serum and flying off to marry her new heart-throb, whom she loves "even more than I loved the original Superman in

vain!" (p. 8, story 3).

If this story is impressive for the ingenuity with which it takes a mere eight pages to eliminate both the Lois-Lana-Superman triangle and the eternal problem of the non-super wife endangered by Superman's foes, the number of problems solved in the book-length imaginary novel "The Amazing Stories of Superman-Red and Superman-Blue" (***SUPERMAN*** #162, July '63) is downright spectacular. The splash page blurb gives an idea of the wonders within: "Superman becomes immune to Kryptonite! The bottle city of Kandor is restored to its original size! The perished planet, Krypton, becomes reborn! All crime and evil disappear!" And that's only the beginning. Once a freak accident during an experiment splits Superman into two Supermans, each a hundred times smarter than the original, a chain reaction of positive events begins that encompasses everything from the two Supermen's

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finding the merpeople of Atlantis an underwater world of their own to a reformed Luthor's inventing an antibiotic that not only cures every known disease, but undoes the effects of blindness and all other physical handicaps. And of course, now that Superman is twins, he can marry both Lois and Lana. There isn't even any squabbling over which twin will marry which woman, since Superman-Red prefers Lois and Superman-Blue Lana. Even Jimmy Olsen and Lucy Lane are taken care of—they get married in a triple ceremony with the two Supermen and their brides. Then everyone (except Jimmy and Lucy) has twins and lives happily ever after.

The breathtaking thoroughness with which the comics creators responsible for this story dispose of every problem known to man, as well as to Superman, suggests that the reason for the scarcity of happy-ending imaginary marriage stories is certainly not a paucity of ideas. Any team ingenious enough to invent cures for literally all the ills to which the flesh is heir could easily have found a

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wide variety of interesting ways to portray a Superman-Lois or Superman-Lana marriage in a positive light, if they had been so inclined. The fact that we were not allowed to hear of Superman really marrying Lois on any Earth until the Justice Society was revived several years ago, or to actually see anything of his Earth-Two married life until quite recently, indicates a deep-seated feeling on the part of comics writers and editors (and readers, who were perfectly content with these omissions) that ideally, the perfect American man represented by Superman never indulges in anything as tame as settling down and making a permanent commitment to one woman, even when he's middle-aged. That this notion that marriage and "the more important things in life," like fighting, one's career, and certifiably macho activities, don't mix is just beginning to break down is obvious both from the relative newness of the Earth-Two "Mr. and Mrs. Superman" strip and its somewhat unimpressive quality. As one reader pointed out in a **LoC**, Cary Bates, the initial writer of the strip, seemed to have some difficulty conceiving of Superman and Lois' married life as much more than "I Love Lucy" with super-heroics on the side. The

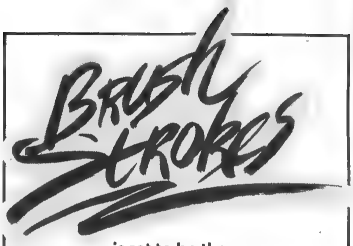
result was often almost as undignified as the constant squabbling and small-minded complaints about lateness for dinner that Cary Bates tried to pass off as the married life of the Flash and his late wife, Iris Allen. If this is marriage, no wonder all big-time superheroes have traditionally been willing to do literally anything to stay single.

There have been many changes over the years in the portrayal of the women in Superman's life and the way he behaves toward them, changes which reflect shifting attitudes in the real world about what role women should play in society and how the ideal man should treat them. Lois Lane has been transformed from a scheming cat obsessed with trapping a man into something resembling a reasonably mature and intelligent human being (a transformation which unfortunately was only faintly reflected in the movie version of Lois, who did have a life and career not centered around Superman, but after meeting him became tiresomely obsessed with one thing—the crucial difference being that this time it wasn't marriage). Superman has changed from a G-rated Don Juan ready to fall for every pretty face, but commit himself to none, to a man who can actually acknowledge that he is serious about wanting to marry Lois Lane (in ***SUPERMAN*** #335, May '79), and come near to admitting that it is only his own psychological hang-ups that prevent him from taking this logical final step.

However, these changes, though vast, are patchy and incomplete. Though Lois is now presented as being sincerely in love with Superman himself, and not his glamorous image, other women in Superman's life, such as Lana Lang, can still be presented as predatory man-chasers. In fact, they apparently must be presented that way, in the opinion of Marty Pasko, who seemed to feel that tradition demanded he include some two-dimensional bitch figure in the ongoing Superman saga, even now that Lois has been permitted to escape that role.

Similarly, Superman is now willing to admit that he does have a lifetime commitment to Lois, just as she has to him. But the old cultural idea that marriage is the death-knell of romance still combines with the more specifically sexist assumption that a real man doesn't let himself get tied down (at least not legally) to make the marriage of the "real," Earth-1 Superman and Lois as much of impossibility as ever.

Perhaps this last situation can never change until society's ideal of romantic love includes long-term commitment as well as love at first sight and melodramatic ***Romeo and Juliet***-type pyrotechnics. But as long as an emotionally mature Lois Lane truly worthy of a Superman's affection is presented as a one-in-a-million exception to the rule represented by an incomprehensibly-motivated cardboard bitch like Lana Lang, comics are in no real danger of exchanging the old four-color fantasy of the man who's so perect he doesn't need women for a new one in which women, too, have a chance of being included in the landscape of the ideal. •



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by Chuck Wooley

INTRODUCTION:

Comic book publishers have often fallen victim to the allure of disseminating deceptive information. This occurs for a variety of reasons, many of them at least partially justifiable. Regardless of intent, however, certain of these practices cause comics historians almost endless difficulties. In fact, this series of articles must confront one of the most frustrating challenges offered to the comics historian: how many publishers have produced comic books, and what are the titles and dates which correlate with the respective publisher?

Answering this question is far more difficult that a reasonable person would expect it to be. Some comics have been published without a listed publisher. Some comics list a publisher, but neglect to list an address. Some comic books list two different publishers simultaneously (although occasionally one of these publisher's names will have been partially obliterated by the printer). Some comics titles, like ***THE BLUE BEETLE***, were published under a variety of imprints.

With regard to this series of articles, though, one particular practice makes the others almost insignificant. For, while most of the above practices can be attributed to either sloppiness or whimsy, a number of publishers, led by the intrepid Martin Goodman, purposefully utilized a seemingly infinite array of publishing company imprints. The justification for so doing was financially based. The author believes that publishers like Goodman—not that there was ever another publisher quite like Goodman—somehow played their myriad of companies against each other on the ledger sheets, creating very significant tax advantages. Since the addresses of the publishers, including Goodman's, changed fairly often, the data one collects must be carefully analyzed in order to determine who published what. Goodman alone accounts for well over 50 imprints, and these will have a variety of addresses.

When one realizes that a number of publishers followed Goodman's lead, one may develop a clearer intellectual model for the problems involved in researching who published what. The only legitimate method for unravelling this mystery involves laboriously noting the listed publisher, the publisher's address, and other associated data (e.g. listed editors and art directors) for every comic ever published. While the author is engaged in this pursuit, the goal cannot be reached quickly. There have been about 4,000 separate comic titles issued since 1899, and these titles have accounted for approximately 75,000 separate comic books.

Even if all of these comics were located in one place, which they are not, a great deal of time would be required to record the necessary information. As things now stand, however, it takes a great deal more time to simply locate the comics than it does to record the information. To its shame, the Library of Congress has failed to keep most of its magnificent comic book collection, forcing researchers to locate private collections with owners generous enough to permit careful research. So, while the author has been engaged in researching comic publishers for many years, it will clearly take many more years to complete the task at hand.

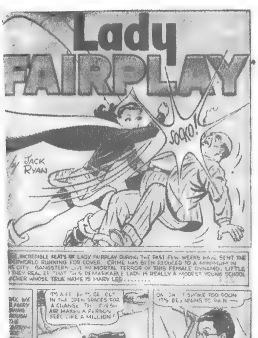
Nonetheless, we must cast aside the fear of making an unavoidable error which results from simply not having access to rare periodicals. It is preferable at this point to risk a mistake in order to achieve the reward of disseminating available information. Towards this end we shall now proceed.

PROGRESSIVE PUBLISHERS, INC.

Although Progressive apparently only published three comic books ever (***BANG-UP COMICS #'s 1-3***, dated Dec '41, Mar '42 and Jun '42, which were released to Manhattan newsstands on October 7, 1941, January 13, 1942, and February 22, 1942, respectively), the comics are absorbing, and showed great promise.

Cosmo Mann graced the covers of issues **#1** and **2**. He was given the lead spot in **#1**, the last spot in **#2**, and a middle spot in **#3**. The three issues together form one 22-page stirring narrative epic. Cosmo's basic powers were his "G" ray and his "sun ray suit." The former could dissolve metal almost instantly, or be used to para-

TWO SPLASHES FROM **BANG-UP COMICS.**



lyze objects ranging from bullets to people.

The latter enabled Cosmo to fly.

With this framework, we could follow Cosmo's exploits as he demonstrated his new "G" ray to the U.S. government, only to have agents of Commander Darke (a German-type) steal the partially disassembled "G" ray from Cosmo's lab. The villains also kidnapped Cosmo's assistant, Archy, believing him to be Cosmo. The first episode concluded as Cosmo vowed to rescue Archy by utilizing Cosmo's "newly-perfected Sun Ray Suit."

The second episode opened with a majestic scene of Cmdr. Darke's dirigible escaping from New York to his hideaway on an Atlantic island. Within the dirigible we found Archy being aroused for an interrogation by Cmdr. Darke, who believed Archy to be Cosmo, and therefore capable of making operative the disassembled "G" ray. Luckily for Archy, he played along with this case of mistaken identity, and managed to survive until Cosmo arrived. Cosmo managed to take control of the dirigible's bridge (the rest of the mighty airship was still under the control of Darke's men), but did so just as a terrific hurricane developed. The second episode concluded with Cosmo preparing to enter the hurricane, dirigible and all.

In the story's spectacular conclusion, a group of Darke's men rushed the bridge, only to be overcome by Cosmo. The ship, however, was about to be overwhelmed by the hurricane, and Cosmo bravely left the bridge to Archy as he flew outside the airship so that he could direct the tail fins in the wind, and thus stabilize the ship. While he was thus engaged, Cmdr. Drake recovered from the effects of the "G" ray's paralysis beam, and subdued Archy on the bridge. Cosmo had no way to discern this, however, and in fact could have done nothing even if he had realized it, as he was totally engaged in saving the zeppelin from the hurricane. By the time the storm was weathered, the airship was above Darke's island stronghold. Cosmo waited until Archy and the "G" ray had debarked, and then, modifying his sun suit, destroyed the zeppelin. In the ensuing turmoil, he swooped down to rescue Archy, who had availed himself of Cosmo's coming by breaking free of his Nazi guard and seizing the now-assembled and functioning ray gun. The two heroes then entered the interior of the stronghold and dissolved the tanks, planes, and assorted armaments that the Axis had placed there to aid in their conquest of the United States of America. Cmdr. Darke, villainous but no fool, deserted the island and Cosmo to head for Mexico. The Coast Guard arrives, having been summoned by Cosmo, and commenced the mopping-up operations. Cosmo and Archy take the Coast Guard ship back to NY, and the final panel stated that Cosmo would return in the next (non-existent) issue of ***BANG-UP COMICS***. The first story was signed by Sam Hill, the second was partially signed Leon Gordon, and the third was signed by both Frank Sam Hamel (an expanded version of Sam Hill?) and Leon Gordon.

These three stories, which form one narrative, are filled with excitement, action, and high entertainment value. This held true for all the features in ***BANG-UP COMICS*** (except the comedic filler pages), whether they operated within the super-hero mode (like **"Cosmo"** and **"Lady Fairplay,"** or within the "adventurous occupations

BANG-UP CRITICISM

by Chuck Wooley

Although the cover of ***BANG-UP COMICS* #1** belonged more to 1939 or 1940 than to late 1941, it was nonetheless engaging. A grinning Cosmo Mann was dissolving tanks adorned with backwards swastikas, by means of a little red box with a window and a handle. The cover of **#2** was up to 1941 standards stylistically, illustrating as it did a courageous, costumed Cosma (he looked half-human, half-airplane) engaged in a terrific air-and-sea battle against Nazi forces. Unfortunately for Progressive, but luckily for comic collectors, the cover of **#3** really belongs to no particular period, being fairly unique stylistically. Its basic crudity can be at least partly attributed to its timeliness, being one of the first comic covers to show US servicemen fighting the Japanese after America's entry into WWII.

The single most striking editorial feature (with the possible exception of Lady Fairplay's see-through skirt on the splash page of **#2**) was unquestionably the messages from an anthropomorphized Bang-Up Comics which appeared inside the front covers of issues **#1** and **#2** (see illo). Clearly, the editor was very proud of the package created for ***BANG-UP COMICS***. Clearly, the editor was willing to go to a great deal of effort to produce quality comics that people wanted to read. The offer of original art in exchange for letters to the editor must have been as attractive to many readers of its day as such an offer would be to readers of our day.

It is important to also realize that the editor, in the form of a smiling copy of ***BANG-UP COMICS***, was not just talking a good comic. In fact, he or she was producing one. The writing was excellent. It was fresh and very exciting. And the artwork was good. It was not quite as polished as the comics of today might expect, but it was far better detailed and illustrative of the narrative than almost all of today's comics.

In fact, the only genuine criticism of the interior features appears to be that they lacked final editing. This is especially significant with very early comics as they operated under different stylizations from the comics of today, and they utilized narrative techniques which are occasionally very different from what is employed currently. Unfortunately, this means that the lack of final editing is more obvious then than now. There is a distracting quantity of commas sprinkled unnecessarily throughout the stories. Certain of the sentences are extremely long and a bit difficult to follow. The worst editorial error occurs on p. 38 of issue **#3**, when the arrows that guide the reader from panel to panel guide the reader from panel five to panel seven and then back to panel six!

To collectors of today, these minor editorial problems merely serve to give the comics character, and serve to recall the very early days of comics publishing when almost everything was different from the way it is today. To the readers of yesterday, however, these "minor details" presented intrusions into the narrative integrity of the story, and probably contributed somewhat to the title's demise.

The totally charming letters from ***BANG-UP COMICS*** personified to its readers, however, the lasting impression which a reader keeps. 1941 was a very different reality from the one in which we live today; and even with much of the world at war, it was a reality which had certain wondrous advantages over the harsher world we know. The presentation of self of ***BANG-UP COMICS*** illustrates a few of these advantages.

mode," like ***"Jeff Barter"*** (an African trader), ***"Adventure Incorporated"*** (no job was too dangerous), ***"Buzz Balmer"*** (a teenager shrunken to a few inches, who performed daring feats for the war effort), ***"Dick Starr of the F.B.I."*** (who hunted saboteurs), ***"Rick Masters, Foreign Correspondent"*** (a neutral American newsman illegally fighting the Nazis), or ***"Spud and Punchy,"*** the cover feature for **#3** (who fought the Japs from a small anti-aircraft boat). These two sailors replaced ***"Rick"*** when war became official, as ***"Rick"*** was no longer neutral, and his basic schtick was therefore gone.

The creative teams producing these stories were doing exceptional work. The writing was creative, innovative, and very fast-paced. The artwork was always at least well done, and occasionally exceptional. John Olson handled jungle affairs remarkably well, and his lion splash for **#3** portrayed one of the most intense beasts to ever stare at a reader. In fact, John must have been extremely pleased with this story, as he signed every page! Ken Ernst (present ***MARY WORTH*** artist), whose style was then almost identical to Lee Elias' Caniff-type work, handled ***"Rick Masters"*** well. Jack Ryan, who signed the fanciful yet energized ***"Lady Fairplay,"*** had a style remarkably like an extremely clean Bill Everett. Van Sull had an engaging minimalistic style for the comedic filler work, and Rick Yager (of ***BUCK ROGERS***) himself handled ***"Buzz Balmer,"*** a direct precursor to DC's 1960s ***ATOM***.

Why, then, did the title fail? Why, in fact, did the publisher fail to produce any more comic books? Who, for that matter, ***was*** Progressive Publishers, Inc.?

V.D. Angerman was listed as the Publisher of ***BANG-UP COMICS***, on the line below the listing of Progressive Publishers, Inc. as Publisher of ***BANG-UP COMICS***. Their mutual address, 800 N. Clark St., Chicago, Illinois, was the same address given for the publishers of ***SCIENCE AND MECHANICS*** in what must be assumed to be a house ad located inside the back cover of issue **#1**.

This provides direct evidence that, in fact, Progressive was another name for the publisher of ***SCIENCE AND MECHANICS***, one of the longer-running periodicals of this century. Apparently the publishers of ***SCIENCE AND MECHANICS*** became aware of the profits some comics publishers had reaped by 1941, and they decided to try for a share.

Of the 500 or so legal entities that have published comic books, approximately 200 have issued only one title. Their lack of success is generally due to one of two reasons: either they issue their comic with remarkable bad timing, or they have serious distribution problems. The actual quality of the material being published seems to have less bearing upon their success than either of these two other factors, although items of extraordinary quality usually do find some measure of success if their publisher can manage to circulate a number of issues.

What caused ***BANG-UP COMICS*** to fail cannot now be determined. Certainly, there were some distribution problems. The first issue, listed as bi-monthly, appeared three months before the second issue, which was also listed as a bi-monthly. The third issue, however, which was listed as a quarterly, appeared only five weeks after the second issue. While this erratic schedule would not ensure the title's failure, it does illustrate that the publisher (whomever or whatever that may be) did not know what the distri-

bution schedule was going to be before it occurred. While some distribution problems occur in magazine publishing under the best of circumstances, this schedule was nonetheless ridiculous.

Another factor contributing to the title's demise was the emphasis on the first two covers science-fictional nature. As explained in the ***SCIENCE FICTION TIMES #6***, SF in comics boomed from 1938 until about 1941, at which time it began to die. In fact, the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 would have been a miserable time to issue SF comics. Many established titles, particularly those issued by Victor Fox, were then dying or already deceased. ***WONDERWORLD***'s last issue was apparently dated January, 1942. Even Wolverton's magnificent Spacehawk could not survive into 1943.

Just as 1979 would have been a miserable year in which to open a new American car dealership (the author understands that between 10 and 30% of all new car dealerships were forced out of business by market conditions last year), 1941 was a bad time to issue a SF comic. And, since ***BANG-UP COMICS*** was not, actually, a SF comic at all, but primarily an adventure title which utilized a few SF elements in some stories, the choice of SF-styled covers was not only deadly, but unnecessary. The publisher may have realized this, and that may be why the poorly drawn Spud & Punch cover was issued on ***#3***. Although the cover was certainly topical, showing US servicemen fighting Japs (just ten weeks after Pearl Harbor was attacked), it had no connection whatsoever with the previous two issues, and it looked crude.

It is this very crudity that must also have contributed to ***BANG-UP***'s demise. As Bob Overstreet notes in his Price Guide, comics from 1941 and earlier are very rare, in any condition. Although the reason for this is generally thought to be the necessity of contributing paper to the waste paper drives of World War II, as well as the Midwestern Comic Book Burnings of the 1950s, why should such a disproportionate number of comics from 1942-44 exist when compared to the 1938-41 comics? The answer is not simply that the 1938-41 issues are

older. While that is certainly a factor, the more important factor is that the earlier comics were much cruder than the later ones. The entire comic book genre was wildly experimental until 1941.

By 1942, however, established publishers like Eastern Color, Timely and DC had discovered that certain formulas and packages were more saleable than others. Production values at established companies began to be defined and adhered to. But not by Progressive: Progressive was issuing a dinosaur. If ***BANG-UP COMICS*** had been issued in 1938 (assuming only competent distribution), the author believes it would have been a major success. The comic market had changed so radically in three years, however, that the rough edges which ***BANG-UP COMICS*** still possessed (including occasionally poor editing) could only be seen as detrimental.

BANG-UP COMICS was, then, an exceptional comic effort, particularly when viewed as a first effort from a new publisher. If it had been allowed another year of development, or if it had been published three years earlier, it could have been a major success story with the comic field. An unfortunate variety of circumstances assailed the nascent publication, however, and the fourth issue, repeatedly promised in ***#3***, never appeared. Whether it was distribution, bad timing, editing, or that sloppy third cover that killed the title, and thus the publisher, we may never know. But for those who are lucky enough to discover a copy of ***BANG-UP COMICS*** for their own collections, a world of high adventure, excitement, and fantasy beckons. •

IV. April Kane

April Kane was introduced into ***TERRY*** in 1938, mainly to give Terry himself a romantic interest. Terry was about sixteen at that time, and glamorous types like Burma and the Dragon Lady were far more Pat Ryan's province than his. April, on the other hand, was about fifteen when introduced, and just about perfect for the strip's young blond hero.

As such, April became more of a regular supporting character than did any of the other females, who appeared sporadically and always disappeared after their adventure was over. While there would be identifiable "Burma plots" and "Dragon Lady plots," April participated fully in plots which did not center around her, much in the same manner as did Pat, Terry and Connie. She was a member of the cast from 1938 straight through to 1942, with one other extended appearance in 1945.

April was, as with all Caniff women, a classic type: in her case, the Southern Belle. She was also, again typically, an expert variation on that theme. From the outset, through her manipulations of Pat and Terry to help her find her missing brother, she seemed to have a good deal of control over the skill of alternating flattery, self-deprecation, and helplessness utilized by the classic coquette to bend men to her will. The quality of April's that prevented the readers from classifying her as one of that pernicious legion was that Caniff took many opportunities to establish her in the mind of the reader as a good-hearted, loyal, even heroic young girl. The two sides of April meshed to the extent that most readers could never fully accept that her tasteful pump-priming and low estimation of her own slight capabilities were merely a pose. Caniff never tipped the balance, either. Even during April's most self-possessed, admirable actions (her willful resistance to Sanjak's hypnosis in the 1938 adventure), Caniff refused to let the rest of her personality be forgotten. Where less responsible writers would saddle the young girl with melodramatic quasi-feminist claptrap, in the actual strip, April resists the leering villainess with: "But I don't want to do crimes—I jus' wanta be home—an' go t'dances an' stuff."

Indeed, Caniff gave April Kane ample opportunity to display as many aspects of her personality as it possessed. In her first adventure, she met Pat and Terry on their search for her brother, Dillon Kane (the foreman for their employer's estate), and was caught with them in the middle of a gang war between Baron DePlexus and the "Most Dangerous Woman Alive," Sanjak. April became a key piece in the struggle when Sanjak hypnotized

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by Richard Howell

BOYS ARE SO COMICAL... ANY GIRL COULD SEE YOU'RE JEALOUS 'CAUSE MR. RYAN IS SO DAWGONE HANDY WITH 'EM LADIES!
WHY, YOU OVERWHELM ME, MISS KANE!
NOW DON'T CARRY ON! YOU KNOW YOU'RE MIGHTY HAN'SOME!... BUT I'M SO GRATEFUL T' BOTH YOU-ALL FOR COMIN' T' HELP ME FIND MY BROTHER... I WOULDN'T DREAM OF PLAYIN' FAVORITES...
....ALTHOUGH I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT IT'S BETTER FOR A GIRL T' BE IN TH' COMPANY OF BOYS NEARER HER OWN AGE... DON'T YOU, MR. TERRY LEE?
OH BOY! I MEAN- YES— I MEAN.... OH BOY!

and captured her, claiming to desire "ze feet student to absorb my knowledge of crime." Two groups, Terry and Pat, and DePlexus, Weazel, and Slugger Dunn, followed Sanjak to Yankuk—one group for rescue and the other for revenge. Ultimately, Terry, April, a wounded Pat, and a penitent Slugger barely escaped Sanjak's exploding headquarters, and when Slugger developed a cramp during their swim away from the island, April unselfishly towed him to safety.

In the subsequent adventure, April developed a pupil/teacher relationship with the Dragon Lady (when April's admiration for the adventurous pirate caused her and her companions to be used as hostages and kidnapped to the D.L.'s mountain stronghold). Although life at the camp (especially under siege) was arduous, even the Dragon Lady came to admire the "tender one's" courage. Their conversations were mostly formal, but Caniff presented a strong picture of the Dragon Lady cherishing April Kane as the girl she never was, and April idolizing the Dragon Lady as the woman she wanted to grow up to be. In a particularly poignant scene, Terry is apprehensive over April's fate (worse than death?) if Klang's attack overcomes the Dragon Lady's forces. He pleads with her: "Promise me that if this place falls, you won't allow Klang to take you alive!" The Dragon Lady, as enigmatic as ever, appears at the doorway to answer for April...

During the tenure of her first three years in ***TERRY***, April Kane remained a fascinating mixture of a tease and a heroine. She embodied all the traits of Southern female gentility, including having more resourcefulness than was immediately apparent. Twice in her first several years in the strip (once with Sanjak and the other against mountain bandits), she drew upon reserves of strength based on her pride in her heritage and her family's heroic deeds. (As she thinks in 1938, "...I ***musn't*** be a sissie! Great Gran'ma Kane wasn't... She hid three o' General Lee's wounded men from the whole Yankee army durin' th' retreat from Gettysburg!") Later, when Sammy the Topper was blackmailing her with her brother's forged signature on some incriminating documents, she, rather than betray her brother or Pat or Terry (the other choice), April removed herself from their lives altogether, leaving Hong Kong, alone, for good.

When April reappeared in 1945 she was a changed woman. Terry, Hotshot Charlie, and Johnny Jingo rescued her from a Japanese ship, and April explained that she had been captured and interned in a Japanese prison for women, and she and Terry picked up where they left off. Although April's surface charm and sweetness remained unchanged by her three-year ordeal, her feelings had altered considerably: As she told Terry (much later), when she was in the camp, she swore to "never again have to depend on anyone other than" herself. She went about this in an intriguing manner: When she, Terry and Hotshot earmarked an island for US occupation and the troops got set up, she established herself as queen of the regiment, belle of the ball, etc., and had most of the GIs under her spell. Having become determined not to leave, she and Colonel Corkin (who found her to be too distracting to the men) waged several battles of wits concerning ***just who*** commanded the men. (One particularly funny episode involved Corkin telling April she could stay if she were married. Her response was "Why Colonel Corkin- I didn't ***dream*** that you came to my house to ***propose***!" Corkin was forced to back down.) Although April ultimately lost her struggle with the Army, her sharp intelligence and wily planning skills were spotlighted throughout the story.

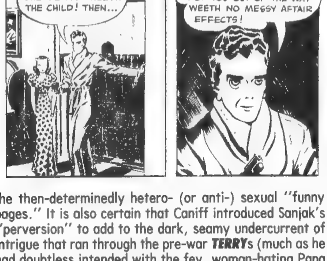
April Kane was introduced into ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES*** primarily because she was a young girl young

enough for its title character, but by her final appearance, she had displayed sufficient individuality, attractiveness, intelligence, and just plain charm to be a worthy addition to the strip whether Terry were present or not. She was also a character who was constantly evolving into a sharper, more worldly and complex version of her original self. April Kane alone is a high achievement for a character writer.

V. Sanjak

The rest of the females in the ***TERRY*** strip fall even more so than April into the category of "supporting characters." They were odd personalities introduced to elicit particular responses from the leading players. Several of them were quite interesting either as minor characters or as concepts, but none of them could have served as the focal point of an entire adventure.

Certainly the most unconventional woman in the cast of ***TERRY*** was Sanjak, the self-proclaimed "most dangerous woman alive." Sanjak's hatred for all men, her dressing in men's clothes, and her kidnapping of April Kane to make her "zee deesciple of the so clevaire Sanjak" all led the more sophisticated reader to a shocking (for then) conclusion: Sanjak was a lesbian. Caniff can be forgiven for this uncharacteristic catering to such a cultural stereotype, as Sanjak's presence alone was a major step for


GOOD! NOW, SANJAK OPEN ONE PANEL, THROUGH WHEECH SHE DEPART WEETH THE CHILD! THEN...
... WHEN THE ROOM EES SEALED AGAIN, A BEET OF ODORLESS GAS WELL PUT YOU OUT OF THE WAY- WEETH NO MESSY AFFAIR EFFECTS!

the then-determinedly hetero- (or anti-) sexual "funny pages." It is also certain that Caniff introduced Sanjak's "perversion" to add to the dark, seamy undercurrent of intrigue that ran through the pre-war ***TERRY***s (much as he had doubtless intended with the fey, woman-hating Papa Pyzon in 1936). The main problem with Sanjak was not that she was a lesbian, or that she was evil; it was that she, like all of the villains in ***TERRY***, was a one-note character. Caniff continually got so caught up in his protagonists and their immediate satellites that he neglected to expand on the personalities of the "heavies." Pyzon, De Plexus, Sanjak, Judas, Klang, even Sandhurst, were all consumed by an indiscriminate desire to Make Trouble For Our Heroes. Whether this was Caniff's conscious effort or not might never be known, but it is nonetheless true that such a Sunday-serial approach to villainy undercut the sophistication of a strip which, more often than not, achieved whichever greatness it attempted.

... I'M SEEING DOUBLE... HAVEN'T SLEPT IN A THOUSAND YEARS... OH, PLEASE, DON'T LET ME FAIL AT THIS, TOO... I'VE TRIED... HONEST, I HAVE ...DON'T KNOW ENOUGH... ALWAYS LACK THAT EXTRA PUNCH... MUST STAY AWAKE...

VI. Raven Sherman

There were two major aspects of Raven Sherman's character which automatically set her apart from her fellows. The first was that she, although on "the side of the angels," did not have any reason to ally herself with our heroes. When Pat and April (then accompanied by the pirate Captain Blaze) first encountered Raven in 1940, she was operating a home for Chinese war orphans. Although she was from a rich family and inescapably socially prominent, Raven had found her true calling helping those youngsters left homeless due to Japanese aggression. Despite the distractions which the plot progressions placed in her way, her commitment to "her brood" continued to be her main drive, as if she were trying to compensate for her social-whirl days and her unimportant (to her) business responsibilities in town. She broke off with her lover, Dude Hennick, at least once because she felt that she had a mission (in a double meaning) in China, and had no business carrying on "like a debutante with date fever." Even Burma, hardly a Raven Sherman fan, realized that "that Sherman dame would walk through fire for her precious orphans."

Raven, like most of Caniff's women, had one major character foible which prevented her personal security: her class-consciousness had atrophied into an attitude of cynicism, repression, and a certain amount of self-dislike. She realized her own weaknesses and her own desires, but proved unsuccessful at coming to grips with them, so she guarded all her emotions constantly. Dude Hennick (and Pat Ryan to an extent) encouraged her to transcend her repressions, and so they were dangerous to her "mission," her valued independence, and her competence. Neither Pat nor Dude entirely realized why Raven could not accomodate one or the other of them ***and*** her work, but Burma and the Dragon Lady each sized up Raven very accurately, each in their own manners. Burma hit close to home with her accusation to Raven, "You're crazy about Dude Hennick but you won't admit it to your-

self because you can't find his name on the Mayflower passenger list." The Dragon Lady came much closer to sizing up Raven's weakness when she said, "It seems your femininity will always be tempered by a strain of cold brass."

Raven's second major distinguishing aspect from the other ***TERRY*** women is a fatal one; Raven was killed in 1941 in the course of a battle against Captain Judas. She was attempting to prevent Judas and his "accomplice" (actually his hostage) Burma from hijacking precious supplies from Raven's refugee relief station, got captured, and was thrown by Judas out of a speeding truck into the path of Terry and Dude's pursuing vehicle. She lingered on for a week, then died, and was buried on a mountain pass overlooking the Chinese countryside.

Raven's death was a major turning point in the nature of the ***TERRY*** strip, which up to that time had had a rather hazy romantic feel to it. Having many characters in life-or-death situations week in and week out, with no one ever getting seriously injured, tended to undercut the elements of tension and menace, with which the plots and the villains were infused. The death of Raven, a popular and unique character in the strip, established once and for all that the cast's adventures were not games, and that both sides were "playing" for keeps. The shift in tone occurred at a well-chosen juncture, for Raven's death occurred in the Autumn of 1941. Within weeks, Terry, his friends, and the rest of America would be inextricably a part of another adventure which was also played for keeps: World War II.

The deftness and genuine compassion with which Raven's death and its effect on those around her were presented was a major part (and effect) of that which this article has been examining all along: that Caniff's ***TERRY*** was so popular and so memorable not due to the adventure aspects, or the trend-setting art techniques, but rather because Caniff's portrayal of human beings and their very real emotions struck universal chords. The women in ***TERRY*** are some of the best examples of Caniff's spellbinding personality-painting (probably partially because his idea of high adventure always included a sexual element), but a different group of characters could have been examined and the result would still be basically the same: Milton Caniff is one of the prime purveyors in modern culture of variation and complexity in the human spirit. ***TERRY*** and "his" women are proof. ●

NEXT ISSUE

An Interview With LEONARD STARR
Creator of Mary Perkins and writer/artist of Annie

The Lost Comics Companies
Uncovers
SHEENA and FICTION HOUSE
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GUILTY FANTASIES

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by Peter B. Gillis

Dear Hal,

I've written my resignation three times. I've been sitting here, staring at my typewriter, a feeling like death in my throat, and I don't think I'll be able to go to sleep tonight.

I think I should let you know why I'm quitting—not that I think you'll understand, but I've got to tell somebody.

It all started as I was trying to write my ***"Guilty Fantasies"*** column, which this letter of resignation replaces. The thought came to me as thoughts often do, as a coalescing of a number of unrelated things. First, I remembered, as I sometimes do, with acute shame, on the bus home from elementary school, that I asked a girl whether she had started menstruating yet. The girl was sweet and a friend of mine, nor was I a foul-mouthed kid. I had just learned about the phenomenon a few days previously. I can still remember the horrified look on her face: she slapped me, turned around, and fumed for the rest of the ride. We never made up.

Wait, wait, hear me out! I know it sounds like I'm gibbering; I've got to explain it all, though. The thing is that a month hasn't gone by, like Bernstein reminiscing about the girl in the white dress in ***CITIZEN KANE***, that I haven't thought about, and hurt from, that incident. I'll bear it with me to the grave. And there are others, some worse, and some more insistent than that. Thinking about that reminded me of an idea in Charles Williams' fantasy novel, ***ALL HALLOWS EVE***, which suggested that the progress of a soul after death consists of reliving all one's sins in spirit form, until they are healed; that every unkind deed or thought is dredged up again until its full evil is lived through, known, repented of and relinquished. And if

we're faced with that, I realized how much of our lives and self-confidence consists of forgetting our own cruelties and nastinesses.

It was then that my eyes drifted over to a stack of my old comics that I had pulled out while looking for my copies of ***ANGEL AND THE APE: ADVENTURE COMICS*** featuring The Spectre. I leafed through them, renewing my dismay at their contents: criminals being turned into wood and put through a buzzsaw (still conscious!), turned into wax dummies and melted, even chopped in two by giant scissors. Yes, and all in a Comics-Code-approved comic. The argument we had came back to me: how you didn't think they were all that bad because the criminals in the books were utter monsters, machine-gunning innocent people and the like, and deserved whatever they got, and how shocked I was and upset that I couldn't make you see how wrong this sort of thing was.

But I'm not quitting over past differences. That didn't even cross my mind as I sat there, absorbed in the books. But when I looked up from my reading, I turned around and there was Steve coming up the stairs! I hadn't seen Steve since high school, and was surprised and delighted.

He was dressed oddly, though, and before I could place what was wrong, a gloved fist came out and punched him in the face.

It took a moment to realize that the fist belonged to me.

There was a loud explosion, thin lines of what looked like black wire hung in the air, and several large paper letters came floating down, fluttering. There was a K, a P, an O, a W, a dot and a dash. Steve just lay there, and the letters floated down, covering him.

I was horrified. I bent over him, noticing that the clothes he was wearing were in fact some sort of costume. But what filled my gaze was Steve's face. His eye was rapidly swelling shut—I could almost see the blood darkening the area around his eye—his lip was torn and gushing blood, so much so that his blood caused his breath to gurgle, and his jaw was somehow ***wrong***, so that he couldn't close his mouth to swallow, but made little noises of pain.

I started to cry, tears running down my face in incomprehension. "Why? Why did I do this to you?" I asked hoarsely.

There was a hand at my shoulder. "He is a villain, Peter Gillis." I wanted to look up at who had said that, but I was too transfixed by the sight of my friend's agonized face.

I don't think Steve saw or heard anything except his pain, but his cries grew louder, terribly inarticulate. It was then that I noticed that his costume was that of the Trapster, one of the Frightful Four.

I whirled around, but I still couldn't quite make out who spoke. There was just a hand holding a comic-book panel, blown up very large so you could see the dots: it was a picture of the Trapster/Steve firing a rifle at somebody, hitting them in the chest; that is, a black line went in the chest and out the other side.

"That's just a comic-book panel! I can even tell you who drew it!"

"Bill Draut," the solemn voice intoned. "Nonetheless, it is the truth."

"How can I know from a stupid drawing?"

"Look at the word balloon," the voice said.

The balloon said, "Eat hot lead, jerks!!" I could tell Gaspar Saladino had lettered it.

Steve had somehow gotten up, standing unsteadily before me. His face was now fuzzy, indistinct before me. Although I let out a scream of protest, my arm hauled off and hit him again. He dropped, clutching his throat. There was a curious bubbling sound: I had broken his windpipe. I wanted to be sick, but I wasn't. My hands were covered with blood. It was warm and sticky, and beginning to cake.

"Blood," I whispered, "Why is there so much blood?"

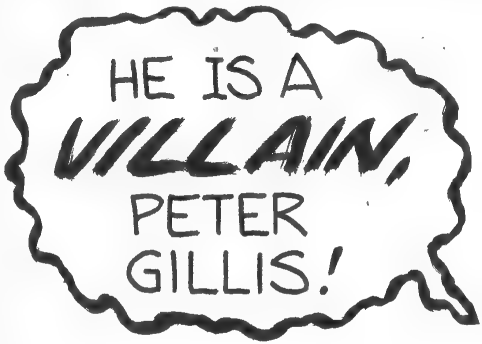
"It's a comic book. What did you expect?"

"There's no —"

And the hand grasped my skull, and suddenly visions flashed through it: Captain America's shield severing a femoral artery; Daredevil's billy club breaking a spine; Hawkman's morgenstern taking out an eye; and everywhere, everywhere, blood.

There they all stood, the Justice League of America and the Avengers, all, all, with bloody costumes. Wonder Woman's and the Wasp's hair were caked with it.

"It happens," said the voice. The super-heroes were all smiling. The blood was not their own. "What do you



think happens when people commit violence on one another?"

"But—just a comic book—"

"You can close your eyes to reality if you want to."

The vision faded. I was alone except for Steve. Suddenly, stiffly, he sat up. "Why did you do it, Peter?" Before each phrase, Steve emitted a horrible wet sucking-gurgling from his throat, and he could not pronounce well with a broken jaw. The sound made me shudder.

"I wasn't—you killed someone, Steve?" My voice cracked into a shriek at the end of my question.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"What do you care? Isn't that reason enough to maim me?"

"Steve, don't —"

"Crying! Good! I cried when I killed. It helped. No," he raised a hand to quiet my protest, "I was guilty. No question about it." There were tears coming out of his one good eye.

"Then—are you sorry you did it?"

"Sorry? Of course I'm SORRY! But does that have anything to do with vengeance? Of justice?" his outburst ended in a wet cough. He spat blood.

"But the blood, Steve —"

"Yes, blood! Whether you like it or not, vengeance is blood, violence is blood, 'super-hero action' is blood. It's morals or justice or rehabilitation, it's blood! You can make all the explanations that you want, all the justifications you want, but you attack someone, that's blood; you avenge a wrong by violence, that's blood! Face it! Or are you squeamish about a little human circulatory fluid?"

"Steve, I've got to understand why you did what you —"

"Understand?" His voice became softer, though still grotesquely distorted. "I know about understanding. That's what makes it so terrible. When a wrong is to be avenged, the good in us simply wants the villain to understand his wrong and repent. Not to suffer—what good is that?—not to die, but to understand and repent. But it never turns out that way. Blood always gets in the way."

And he lay down again and was dead.

I looked at my hands. I was dressed in some funny costume too, but my gloves were soaked with brownish blood, and my arms were too, up to my elbows. I didn't want to know what 'super-hero' I was. I wanted to die.

"You are to blame, Peter Gillis. You have written stories of violence," a distant voice I had not heard before intoned. "You have made it look like fun, made it look good."

"But cartoony action —" I pleaded.

"Look at this picture," the voice said. And there was another comic book panel with Steve's twisted, bloody face on it. It looked like Graham Ingels this time. "Can this **ever** be a good thing? LOOK!"

I couldn't. I ran.

I got back to my house, and climbed up the stairs to my room. And out of the file cabinets where I store my comics—my beloved comics, blood was pouring. Oceans of it. I drowned in it, sobbing, sobbing.

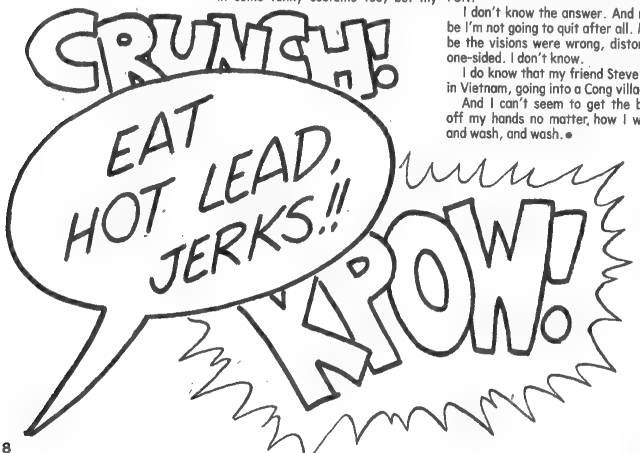
And woke up.

Hal, I know all about adventure and action and entertainment, and I also know that sometimes violence in defense can be necessary. But can we ever see, should we ever show violence, personal attack, as **good**? As FUN?

I don't know the answer. And maybe I'm not going to quit after all. Maybe the visions were wrong, distorted, one-sided. I don't know.

I do know that my friend Steve died in Vietnam, going into a Cong village.

And I can't seem to get the blood off my hands no matter how I wash, and wash, and wash.•



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END NOTES

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Steve Gerber's ***HOWARD THE DUCK*** stories for Marvel Comics succeeded in being both funny and serious; the ***DUCK*** stories since his departure have been neither. ***HOWARD*** drew its uniqueness from the fact that it was a medium for expressing one writer's personal vision. When Gerber left, so did the series' essence. The stories have degenerated into mere parodies, and the workings of Howard's mind, which were once capable of surprising the reader, have become all too predictable.

Luckily the essence of the series has not been lost; it has instead transmigrated into a new form, that of Gerber's new ***STEWART THE RAT***, pencilled by longtime ***HOWARD*** artist Gene Colan and inked by Tom Palmer (Eclipse Enterprises, $6.95). But this is not to say that Stewart is the same character as Howard, having merely exchanged feathers for fur. What he has seen of life has made Howard a cynical curmudgeon. Stewart seems instead to be a victimized innocent, hoping for the best from life but often receiving the worst instead. Howard's perennial expression is one of wary disdain; Stewart often wears one conveying melancholy resignation. Perhaps Stewart is like what Howard must have been before he was embittered by life on his home world. It may be because Stewart is less of a malcontent than Howard that he reacts with even greater fury than the Duck's to menaces to the safety and happiness of himself and his friends.

STEWART is also a work with greater depth than Gerber's ***HOWARD*** had yet achieved. It begins with a lengthy suicide note, presented in prose with a few illustrations rather than in comics form, from one Stewart Dropp, a geneticist whose personality has been warped since his childhood. Dropp wants to restructure the human form, but he is hardly the best imaginable choice for the role of playing God. In his letter Dropp unwittingly reveals himself to be a highly repressed individual full of self-hatred, intense sexual urges, and misogyny. Dropp himself recognizes his "compulsion... to tear stuff apart" and then examine the remains. This is what is most unnerving about Dropp. Eventually he explodes in psychotic rage at rejection by his girlfriend and murders her, yet in his concern to describe fully his final experiment, he nearly forgets to mention the murder in the letter. Nor is there anything resembling a cry of despair in this suicide note. Dropp is driven by his churning emotions, finally to a grotesque form of self-destruction, and yet he writes with this eerily insane detachment from them. Ultimately Stewart is concerned only with himself—he contemptuously dismisses his former lover as having been no more than "inert cellular matter" even when alive—but he never recognized his own enormous character flaws. "One cannot miss the forest for the trees, but even miss the trees if inordinately engrossed in the bark," Dropp observes. He recalls that his girlfriend said he never knew how to be a rat. But Dropp was a rat in human form, who fathers a second Stewart, who turns out to be a human in rat's form.

Before killing himself Dropp implants some of his own DNA and some of a rat's into one of his deceased girlfriend's ova, which he then places within an "AlumniWomb." With Dropp's demise the story shifts from prose and grimness into comics and fantasy. This is not at all an evangelical Christian book, yet, as the chapter heading tells us, Stewart is "born

OH. THEN ALL THAT STUFF YOU TOLD ME ABOUT RATS--
--THAT WE'RE PLAGUE-CARRIERS, THAT WE GNAW THE EARS OF INFANTS IN THEIR CRIBS--
--IS INAPPLICABLE IN MY INDIVIDUAL CASE?

again," this time as a very real-looking rat, innocent of evil and the old Stewart's perversities. Virtually the first thing the new Stewart does is to destroy the old Stewart's treatise on creating "parahumans"—by eating it.

Here the story takes on something of a fairy tale aspect. The new Stewart as yet lacks full human intelligence but has much in common with a human child; he seeks not simply food but freedom and, as we see when he dons the old Stewart's glasses, knowledge. He must also live in a child's nightmare world come true, as he finds himself constantly menaced by giant, more powerful beings (owls, serpents and human hunters). He must thus undergo the first of many ordeals life will impose upon him in the story. The child-rat's quest finally becomes explicitly mythic as, in a dream, he ascends a phallic mountain to gain "wholeness" from drinking the "bitter" blood from the pool at its top. By doing so Stewart bursts from childhood into adolescence, if not adulthood, with full human intelligence. He has undergone another "Rebirth," the chapter heading informs us, but the transition to adulthood is somehow sorrowful as well as fulfilling; the mountain he scaled lay "across a sea of tears." The now larger, anthropomorphic Stewart wakes with a primal "skeek" and his first words let us see that he, like Howard, has found himself "trapped in a world he never made."

In Stewart's first encounter with humans after this, he seems a vulnerable Everyman, humbly asking for help from those who are stronger, for food in this case, only to be savagely punished: he is Oliver Twist as a rodent. The difference between this Stewart and his namesake is obvious in the rat's reaction: rather than anger Stewart feels only childlike disbelief that his harmless request could trigger such brutality. Luckily, Stewart is immediately adopted by a surrogate mother, Rose Lake, who proves to be both a caring friend and a no-nonsense taskmaster. Her screenwriter daughter Sonja follows an "unsparing work regime: eight hours a day at the typewriter, six days a week."

Surprisingly, one of the book's themes is a very traditional American one: the value of hard work. "Competence" is a key word in this story. The Lakes' belief in the work ethic sharply contrasts with the ideas of some of their fellow residents of the Los Angeles area. "People are getting very strange," comments Sonja. "It's like we've reached a new consensus. Nobody has to function any more. We'll all have an alibi instead. Individual endeavor is for suckers. Work is declasse." The story suggests that one establishes his identity not through introspective self-absorption but through hard-earned achievement.

PEOPLE ARE GETTING VERY STRANGE.
IT'S LIKE WE'VE REACHED A NEW CONSENSUS. NOBODY HAS TO *FUNCTION* ANYMORE.
WE'LL ALL HAVE AN *ALIBI* INSTEAD.

Thus Stewart continues his spiritual odyssey by fighting through a new set of ordeals for his survival and Sonja's. Stewart finds himself doing battle with villains who embody what Gerber sees as the worst aspects of the late 1970s Southern California subculture of psychobabble. Moreover, they represent aspects of the old Stewart as well. By overcoming the villains he symbolically exorcises what they stand for from himself and his world.

The first of these menaces, the Disco Zombie, is more than an easy shot at a form of music. In the lyrics the Zombie chants we can see the old Stewart's compulsion to destroy, his hatred of women, his blindness to reality, and his self-destructivess coupled paradoxically with his lack of concern for anything aside from his own well-being. Yet the Zombie smiles, sings and dances, as if his behavior and attitudes were something to celebrate. This mindless "dancing corpse" is an image of the death in life that the story argues such emotions and outlooks can create in a person.

Similarly, the second villain, Caine the Dope Fairy, is more than a parodic portrait of a fanatical devotee of drugs. Caine revels in his own supposed greatness and insists on "**My** needs! **My** needs!" while remaining oblivious to those of his captive Sonja's. He has convinced himself he is giving her an opportunity to "open up to new awareness" by taking her prisoner. Caine dresses as a super-hero and "just gets off on helping others," we are told, but is no more a true altruist than Dropp, who once saved his girlfriend from a rapist only to end by killing her himself. When Caine carries off Sonja he is acting more as rapist than rescuer; indeed, he tells her he has no compunction about letting her die if she resists him.

Finally there is the mastermind, Sonja's former lover Dr. Wayne Fossick, the most fully realized of Gerber's villains who justify their amorality through mind-deadening ideologies, like the Bozos from ***DEFENDERS***, the Yucchies from ***HOWARD*** and the Entropists from ***MAN-THING***. Fossick raves about developing one's potential, but

LATER...
YOU WERE RIGHT, SONJA.
CLOTHES MAKE THE RAT.
DID YOU HEAR HIM?, "MELLOW OUT"--"CONSERVE YOUR NOOGS"--!
THAT SALESMAN WAS OUTRAGED I'D HOLD HIM TO HIS WORD!

his initial sin lay in failing to try to fulfill his own. In giving up so easily on his profession as a writer by refusing to do the work necessary for a chance at success, Fossick showed himself in Sonja's eyes to be "lazy, weak, a coward." Bravery lies in rising to challenges, as small Stewart does again and again despite the odds; cowardice, the story argues, can lie in retreating from challenges to one's abilities and talents. So Fossick devised his "noog" philosophy, which he convinced himself justified his retreats from everything.

He explains it in an excerpt from his book, which, like the suicide note from an equally warped mind, is presented to us in prose. He no longer cares about working to achieve "exterior goals." He no longer cares about other people, or relationships with them. Like Dropp, he cares only about himself. More than Dropp did, Fossick denies being affected by his own emotions. Both men, in Fossick's words, conduct their "transactions with reality from an inner distance" emotionally. Like Dropp too, Fossick tries to restructure human bodies to suit his own strange vision. Fossick goes even further: Dropp was a perverse rationalist but Fossick rejects complex thought entirely. "The byword of noog therapy is if the mind is over, nothing matters." If so, then one can even retreat from moral choice: "Evil is good," Fossick pronounces. Ultimately he writes that "Dead is alive," as was literally true for his "implement" the Zombie. By denying the value of anything, Fossick can pronounce himself a success just for existing. He begins the excerpt from his book stating that "*I* am the symbol of the 70s" and ends with pure hubris, comparing himself to God. Denying his vengeful motivations to himself, he proceeds to play God by turning people into subservient monsters, killing his pawns, and trying to wreck Sonja's life. In his confrontation with Fossick, Stewart faces both a mirror image of his previous "self" and the enemy of all the values he, the Lakes, and society itself hold dear.

"Stewart's role in Fossick's ultimate fate is too ruthless, but it is nonetheless true that Fossick literally asked for it. "Shut up and grow!" shouts Stewart to Fossick as what looks like a severed umbilical cord—but is not—drifts before the latter. But while Stewart the Rat was "reborn" and "grew" into a courageous defender of others, Fossick achieves not rebirth and moral growth but a state more appropriate to his vision of reality.

Sonja too undergoes spiritual growth, from a somewhat abrasive woman who finds refuge from trouble in profanity and gin to someone capable of being deeply moved by the actions of the first person to care enough for her to risk his life over her. Yet Stewart and Sonja seem to find it hard to express their affection for each other, and one wonders if and how their relationship will further develop.

Stewart shows us Gene Colan doing his best work in quite a while. He magically pulls off the feat of putting a "funny animal" into a naturalistic world and making it all look perfectly real, and it is a joy to look at the very realistic and individualistic faces on his human characters and to watch how the expressions on Stewart's face so perfectly convey his emotions.

Stewart the Rat is, in short, a brilliant graphic novel that leaves me hoping to see a sequel. We cannot allow that unique blend of the serious and the comedic to vanish yet again. ●

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